Lives 'remain stable'

Russian economy hit by sanctions, but displays resilience in 2022

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Westernmost airport in Xinjiang opens to traffic

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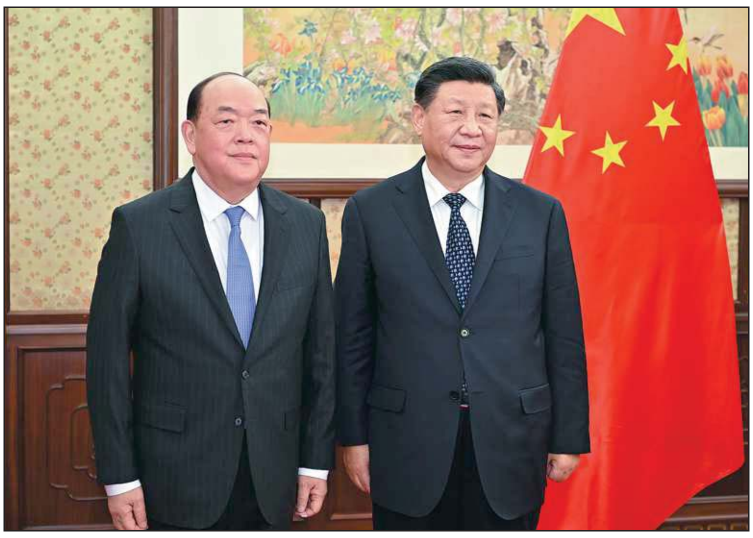
WEEKEND EDITION

CHINA DAILY

December 24 - 25, 2022 中国日报 chinadaily.com.cn RMB ¥2

President Xi Jinping meets on Friday with Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region John Lee Ka-chiu, who is on a visit to Beijing. LI TAO / XINHUA



President Xi Jinping meets on Friday with Chief Executive of the Macao Special Administrative Region Ho Iat-seng, who is on a visit to Beijing. LI TAO / XINHUA

Xi commends progress in HK, Macao

President meets, hears work reports from chief executives of two SAR govts

By XU WEI
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President Xi Jinping has underlined "one country, two systems" as the best institutional arrangement in ensuring the long-term prosperity and stability of the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions, pledging full support for the SAR governments in exercising lawful governance.

Xi made the remarks on Friday during separate meetings at the Zhongnanhai leadership compound with Chief Executive of the Hong Kong SAR John Lee Ka-chiu and Chief Executive of the Macao SAR Ho Iat-seng, who were visiting Beijing.

The president heard reports from them and commended their work as chief executives, as well as that of the two SAR governments.

During the meeting with Lee, Xi said that the central government will fully, faithfully and unswervingly carry out the principle of "one country, two systems", and make the utmost efforts to support the lawful governance of the Hong Kong SAR government and its chief executive.

He pledged full support for Hong Kong in giving play to its unique strengths, conducting extensive international cooperation and better integrating itself into overall national development.

He said that the SAR will see abundant opportunities and broad prospects in the new era.

The president gave full recognition to the work of Lee in leading the new SAR government in assuming its duties, saying that he has led the SAR government in staying pragmatic and enterprising and has united all sectors of society in resolutely safeguarding national security.

He praised Lee's leadership of the SAR government for restoring the vitality of the region's economy and also proactively responding to public concerns.

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Xi also spoke positively of the efforts to study, publicize and implement in Hong Kong the guiding principles of the 20th National Congress of Communist Party of China. The city is taking on new vitality from "patriots administering Hong Kong" and marching steadily forward on the right track of "one country, two systems", he said.

During the meeting with Ho, Xi said that the central government will comprehensively, faithfully and unswervingly implement "one country, two systems", fully back Macao in giving play to its strengths and characteristics and enable the SAR to work toward new progress in the practice of "one country, two systems" with its own characteristics.

He said that Ho has led the Macao SAR government in exercising prudent governance, maintaining social stability, and making solid progress in amending the city's Law on Safeguarding National Security and its Gaming Law.

Xi also hailed Macao's proper handling of revising gambling-related legislation, rebidding for licenses to operate casinos and pushing forward with the development of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, Guangdong province.

On Thursday, Premier Li Keqiang met with the two chief executives and heard their work reports.

While meeting with Lee, the premier highlighted the need for the Hong Kong SAR to expand high-level opening-up, cement and elevate its position as an international financial, trade and aviation hub, and accelerate steps to develop itself into a global powerhouse for innovation and science and technology.

He called for more steps to improve public well-being and deliver greater benefits to the city's residents through growth.

Li urged related authorities to expedite communication and coordination in order to gradually normalize personnel exchanges between Hong Kong and the mainland.

Lee welcomed the support and care from the central government for Hong Kong, saying that the city will fully amplify the unique strengths from "one country, two systems" and take its development onto a new stage.

While meeting with Ho, Li called on the Macao SAR to further diversify its economy, continuously improve people's well-being and maintain its long-term prosperity and stability.

Xi sends greetings to Slovenia's new head of state

By CAO DESHENG
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President Xi Jinping has congratulated Natasa Pirc Musar on her taking office as Slovenia's president, saying that he stands ready to work with her in promoting bilateral ties.

In a congratulatory message sent to Musar on Thursday, Xi said that in recent years, China and Slovenia have maintained steady development of bilateral ties with political mutual trust enhanced constantly, synergy between their development strategies strengthened and fruitful achievements from pragmatic cooperation in various fields.

Noting that he attaches great importance to the development of relations with Slovenia, Xi said that he is willing to work with Musar to consolidate the traditional friendship between the two countries, deepen exchanges and cooperation in various fields and advance the higher-level development of bilateral ties to deliver more benefits to the two countries and their peoples.

Musar, 54, took the oath of office during a ceremonial session of Slovenia's National Assembly on Thursday. She is the country's fifth, and first female, president.

A lawyer, former journalist and former national information commissioner, Musar was elected last month. She won 54 percent of the vote and beat her competitor, conservative lawmaker and former foreign minister Anze Logar.

Dialogue eyes key role of youth in RCEP region's growth

By ZHANG YUNBI
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Investing in and empowering young people is vital for members of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership free trade pact to shore up sustained growth and accelerate global economic recovery amid the ravaging COVID-19 pandemic, leading scholars and media executives said.

They made the call on Friday at the high-end RCEP Youth Dialogue themed "Pooling the strength of youth, promoting regional development".

The dialogue, co-organized by China Daily, the China Institute for Reform and Development and China Oceanic Development Foundation, focused on the RCEP — a 15-nation free trade pact which was officially enacted on Jan 1.

The RCEP consists of all 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, as well as China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

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The grouping accounts for around 30 percent of the world's total population, economic output and trade.

Since taking effect this year, the RCEP has manifested enormous dynamism and huge potential for future development, speakers told the opening ceremony of the forum.

Qu Yingpu, publisher and editor-in-chief of China Daily, said, "The world economy has been struggling to recover in the face of multiple impacts. The prospects for the world economy next year remain far from rosy."

As the free trade pact covering the largest population and size of economy and trade in the world in comparison with other pacts, the RCEP is "definitely going to further play its role as a stabilizer and a driver of the global economy", Qu said.

In the first 10 months of this year, China's total trade with the other 14 member states of the RCEP increased by 8.4 percent year-on-year, he noted.

"The RCEP substantially boosts the scale, quality and depth of regional economic integration, and it plays an important role in advancing the economic recovery, peace and stability of the entire region as well as the whole world, and boosting the well-being of the people," Qu said.

In his speech, Qu called on young people in RCEP member countries to pool their wisdom and create an enabling environment for the region's development, boost mutual understanding among people in RCEP member states, and advance openness, cooperation and mutual benefit in the region.

Lyu Bin, president of China Oceanic Development Foundation, noted that the Asia-Pacific has become one of the most economically dynamic regions in the world, and it boasts a high level of trade liberalization.

"Over the past 100 to 200 years, the pivot of the global economy and trade was in Europe and North America. The founding of the RCEP symbolizes that the world economy is starting to shift its pivot to the Asia-Pacific region," Lyu said.

*See **Dialogue,** page 3*

Coping with cold

An American Airlines plane is de-iced at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport in Minnesota, United States, on Thursday. Temperatures plunged far and fast on Thursday as a winter storm formed ahead of Christmas weekend, promising heavy snow, ice, flooding and powerful winds across a broad swath of the US and complicating holiday travel. DAVID JOLES / STAR TRIBUNE VIA AP

Yunnan protects its wild side

Life, p9

国内统一编号:
CN11-0091
国际标准编号:
ISSN0253-9543
邮发代号:1-3

ANN ASIA NEWS NETWORK
A member of the Asia News Network

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Vol.42 — No. 13297

China calls on US to adopt sincere approach to bilateral relations

By MO JINGXI
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State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi urged the United States on Friday to take seriously China's legitimate concerns and stop suppressing China's development, saying that Washington's "old routine of unilateral bullying" did not and will not work for China.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks as he spoke by phone with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

He said that the US should work with China to transform the consensus reached by the two heads of state during their meeting in Bali, Indonesia, last month into practical policy and concrete actions.

The US should not attempt to suppress China while seeking dialogue with it, and cooperate with China while stabbing it in the back, Wang said.

The phone conversation came following the meeting between President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden in Bali on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Indonesia. During the meeting, the two presidents agreed to take action to bring bilateral ties back on the right track.

Earlier this month, Vice-Foreign Minister Xie Feng held talks with a high-level visiting US delegation in Langfang, Hebei province, to follow through on the common understandings between the two heads of state.

Wang described the meeting as "in-depth and constructive", and he urged greater efforts to advance consultations on the principles guiding China-US relations, push for dialogue in various fields at all levels in an orderly manner and solve specific problems between the two countries through joint working groups.

Wang reiterated that China will continue to firmly safeguard its sovereignty, security and development interests, urging the US to abandon the zero-sum mentality, which, he said, will only lead the two major countries to confront each other.

The two countries need to find out the right way for them to get along with each other, thus making contributions for the benefit of both peoples and for the peace and stability of the world, he said.

Blinken said the US stands ready to work with China to work out a guiding principle for bilateral ties, manage their relations in a responsible way, and carry out cooperation in areas of shared interests.

The US will continue to follow the one-China policy and will not support "Taiwan independence", he said.

Blinken commended China's leadership as the presidency of the 15th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, saying that his country expects to jointly implement the framework adopted at the COP15 with China.

They also exchanged views on the Ukraine issue. Wang said China always stands on the side of peace and the principles of the United Nations Charter. China will continue to play a constructive role in its own way in resolving the crisis, he said.

On Thursday, when meeting with John L Thornton, co-chair of the Board of Trustees of the Asia Society in Beijing, Wang said that China is open to dialogue with the US at all levels.

US businesses and strategic and academic professionals are welcome to come to China for more face-to-face exchanges to enhance mutual understanding between the two countries, he said.

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CHINA

Fire drill

Firefighters conduct a drill at the Potala Palace in Lhasa, Tibet autonomous region, on Thursday. The exercise tested the ability of the palace's firefighting team and enhanced fire safety for the world heritage site. LIU YU / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Briefly

BEIJING

Train tickets on sale for Spring Festival

Train tickets for China's upcoming Spring Festival travel rush will go on sale on Saturday, according to the country's railway operator. The travel rush, usually a period with high transportation demand as people return home to celebrate the Spring Festival, will run from Jan 7 to Feb 15. China's railway authorities will step up efforts to coordinate COVID-19 prevention and control with transportation work to improve the quality of railway transportation during the travel rush, according to the China State Railway Group. China's railway system will constantly optimize its COVID-19 response and transportation services to improve passengers' travel experiences, the railway operator said.

Court vows further protection for TCM

China's top court has introduced guidelines on strengthening judicial protection for intellectual property in Traditional Chinese Medicine. The guidelines, issued recently by the Supreme People's Court, put forth targeted measures regarding major areas and key issues of TCM, providing clear guidance for the adjudicatory work related to TCM intellectual property. The guidelines vow to beef up the judicial protection of well-known trademarks, traditional brands and time-honored brands in TCM, and promote the passing down and development of TCM brands.

TIBET

Tibet to build three waste-free cities

China's Tibet autonomous region will strive to build three cities, including the regional capital Lhasa, into waste-free cities by 2025, according to regional authorities. Lhasa, Shigatse and Lhokha of this southwestern region are included in a national drive to build around 100 waste-free cities in the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-25), which is led by the Ministry of Ecology and Environment and 17 other ministerial-level bodies. Waste-free cities aim to achieve minimum production, optimized utilization and safe disposal of municipal solid waste. A relevant work program recently issued by the regional government of Tibet puts forward multiple waste-free tasks for the three cities, including promoting green agricultural production, building green mines, and enhancing the comprehensive utilization of industrial solid waste. China started piloting waste-free cities in 2019.

XINHUA

China, Switzerland upgrade capital ties

By **ZHANG YUE** in Beijing and **SHI JING** in Shanghai

Capital market ties between China and Switzerland have been strengthened with mutual recognition of auditing standards and supervision between the countries.

According to an announcement released by China's Ministry of Finance on Friday, the Chinese regulatory body has realized the mutual equivalence of auditing standards and auditing supervision with the Swiss Federal Audit Office.

For accounting firms that are registered in the Swiss Confederation or the People's Republic of China and issue audits on the financial statements of economic entities, the auditing supervision systems in the two countries are equivalently applicable, according to the announcement.

The mechanism will take effect on Jan 1.

According to China's Ministry of Finance, the latest move has laid the groundwork for a mutually beneficial auditing supervision cooperation mechanism and is conducive to promoting the connectivity of the countries' capital markets.

Accounting firms in the two economies will see their auditing costs and efficiency enhanced. Chinese companies will thus be provided with more investment and financing channels, said the Ministry of Finance.

Cooperation between China and Switzerland regarding capital markets has accelerated over the past few years.

In September 2021, accounting standards and related supervision in the two economies were mutually recognized.

In a regulation for global depositary receipts issuance under the stock market connectivity programs released on Feb 11, China Securities Regulatory Commission, the country's top securities watchdog, included Switzerland and Germany as GDR issuance destinations.

As of Dec 20, a total of 40 A-share companies have started their GDR issuance applications, of which nine have been successfully completed.

Except for Mingyang Smart Energy, which opted for the London Stock Exchange, all the other eight GDR issuers chose to float on the SIX Swiss Exchange.

Globally, GDRs refer to a certificate, issued by a depositary bank, representing shares in a foreign stock on two or more global markets. GDRs in China stand for the certificates of A-share stocks traded in overseas markets, denominated in yuan.

The relatively higher efficiency at the Swiss bourse is one major attraction, according to experts from Baker McKenzie FenXun law firm.

While it usually takes three to four months for an A-share company to issue GDR at the Swiss exchange, the process is more stringent in London, which may take up to six months. The compliance costs at the London exchange are also higher, they said.

The faster process in Switzerland can help Chinese companies reach experienced institutional investors and global capital more quickly, said Zou Jun, a lawyer from Guantao Law Firm.

It has also provided one more option for outbound Chinese companies seeking overseas listings, which used to be mainly sought in the United States and Hong Kong, he said.

Chinese companies' global mapping will facilitate the stable development of the Chinese capital market and its internationalization, he added.

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Investment advisers boost confidence

By **QIU QUANLIN** in Guangzhou
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As a newly-appointed investment adviser for Guangdong province, Nicolas Poirot, president and CEO of Air Liquide (China) Holding, said he believed an optimized investment environment in Guangdong had helped to boost the company's confidence in business expansion in the province.

"The economic development in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area has attracted us to continuously expand investment in energy conversion, hydrogen energy, electronics, medical care and other innovative technologies," he said.

Poirot was one of 16 advisers newly appointed by Guangdong authorities for global investment during the 2022 Global Investment Promotion Conference for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, which was held on Wednesday in Guangzhou, Guangdong's capital.

The appointment followed the first batch of 22 global investment advisers, who were selected from domestic and foreign economic and industrial and commercial circles last year.

The advisers will be responsible for promotion of the investment and business environment in Guangdong, helping attract more global high-end talent and projects to invest and develop in the province.

"We will continue to benefit from the infrastructure development and great positioning of Guangdong, and most importantly, the province's new focus on high-tech manufacturing and semiconductors, and expansion of the petrochemical and health care industries," he said.

> "The economic development in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area has attracted us to continuously expand investment in energy conversion, hydrogen energy ..."
>
> **Nicolas Poirot,** president and CEO of Air Liquide (China) Holding

As a French-headquartered Fortune Global 500 company, Air Liquide, a global industrial and medical gas supplier, plans to invest in both the semiconductor industry in Shenzhen and petrochemicals in the coastal area of Guangdong.

"The GBA is very promising for hydrogen and green hydrogen as one of the means to develop future mobility, cleaner mobility in Guangdong," he said. Currently, hydrogen can be used for heavy and commercial vehicles, trucks and smaller trucks entering cities in Guangdong.

After establishment of its first industrial gas plant in Shenzhen in 2009, Air Liquide has set up its footprints in various cities including Qingyuan, Dongguan and Maoming.

"With our rich experience in supplying gas to large petrochemical bases around the world, we hope to play an important role in the energy transformation and development of strategic emerging industries in the Greater Bay Area," he said.

As a Japan-based auto parts supplier, Yazaki will strengthen cooperation with Guangdong authorities in the new energy vehicle industry, according to Murata Hideaki, president of Yazaki (China) Investment Corporation.

"Development of new energy vehicles in China, especially in Guangdong, which has a very favorable investment environment and a very large development space for foreign businesses, has been rapid in recent years," he said.

During a signing ceremony for major projects held on Wednesday, Yazaki concluded a cooperation agreement for construction of a new energy auto parts manufacturing base in Shantou, in the eastern coastal area of Guangdong.

On Wednesday, a total of 853 cooperation projects worth of 2.5 trillion yuan ($357 billion) were signed during the 2022 Global Investment Promotion Conference for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

Projects ranged from advanced manufacturing, biotechnology, new generation information technology and food to health care, reflecting domestic and overseas investors' confidence for development of the Greater Bay Area.

Westernmost airport opens to passengers

Tashikurgan facility a new hub to connect central and southern Asia

By **MAO WEIHUA** in Urumqi and **LUO WANGSHU**

> **3,258 meters**
> Altitude of the Tashikurgan airport in Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region

China's westernmost civil aviation airport opened to traffic on Friday in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, establishing a new air hub to central and southern Asia and better connecting the region.

The Tashikurgan airport, located at 3,258 meters above sea level, is in Tashikurgan Tajik autonomous county, in the western part of Pamir Plateau. It is a major international passage in Xinjiang, bordering Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan. The airport is 298 km from Kashgar, a major city in the region.

Construction began on the airport in April, 2020. It can accommodate 160,000 passenger trips and handle 400 metric tons of cargo, as well as 1,900 departures and landings each year. The airport cost more than 1.6 billion yuan ($229 million).

On Friday, a flight operated by China Southern Airlines flew from Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang, to Tashikurgan. The trip takes about two and a half hours.

The opening of the airport has greatly reduced travel time. In the past, passengers had to take road or air transport to Kashgar and transfer by bus to Tashikurgan. The trip took at least eight hours.

Now, as travel time has been slashed, travelers can fly from other cities to Urumqi and transfer to a flight from there to Tashikurgan.

People can also fly from Urumqi to other cities such as Beijing, Xi'an of Shaanxi province and Shenzhen of Guangdong province.

"It is a big day for 41,000 local people in Tashikurgan. With the opening of the airport, Tashikurgan is no longer a remote area, but a hub to Central and South Asia. We have built a comprehensive transport system with national roads as main routes, as well as rural roads and an airport. The improved transport link will boost local tourism and rural vitalization," said Huang Xiangbai, Party chief of Tashikurgan Tajik autonomous county.

"Our family moved from a mountain in Maeryang township and now lives in an apartment with tap water, electricity and heat. Now we can even take a flight to Urumqi. I could never imagine that before. I want to go to Beijing and Shanghai in the future," said local herdsman Memereyim Mahsat.

He also welcomed tourists from across the country to take the flight to see Pamir Plateau.

Hao Hengchen from Jinan of Shandong province took the maiden journey from Urumqi to Tashikurgan on Friday.

He said the facilities of the new airport are full of modern design. The scenery along the way is beautiful and worth the ticket price.

The airline has adopted a modified Airbus 319 to fly the high plateau airport. "The lack of oxygen has a high requirement for the aircraft's engine. The Airbus 319 has an advantage in this respect, so we chose this aircraft to fly," said captain Li Ke.

Contact the writers at luowangshu@chinadaily.com.cn

Crew members of the first flight are warmly received at the Tashikurgan airport on Friday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Chinese researchers develop new method to preserve female fertility

HEFEI — A group of Chinese scientists has developed a new method to preserve ovarian follicles of mice at very low temperatures, increasing their viability by more than 30 percent after recovering, compared with conventional methods.

The results shed light on a promising approach for fertility preservation in women, according to the study published in the journal Nature Communications.

For prepubescent girls or women in urgent need of cancer treatment, follicle cryopreservation is almost the sole option to preserve their fertility.

However, the protective agents used in the current method of follicle cryopreservation often lead to a poor result due to their high concentration and toxicity, said the paper.

Researchers from the University of Science and Technology of China, in collaboration with counterparts from the First Affiliated Hospital of Anhui Medical University, reduced the demand for the highly toxic protective agents and lowered their concentration by 75 percent, said the paper, increasing the viability of mouse follicles by more than 30 percent.

In further research, egg cells obtained from these follicles were fertilized in vitro and developed into healthy mouse pups after embryo transfer, said Zhao Gang, the research leader at the university.

The patent for this technology has been filed and is expected to be applied clinically in related hospitals in Anhui province in the next year, Zhao added.

XINHUA

TOP NEWS

Kind deeds witnessed amid drug shortages

By CHENG SI
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Some anonymous and unsung heroes, who shared their COVID-19 medications with strangers for free, have brought moments of warmth to this cold winter.

"I have extra doses of medications for relieving coughs and congestion. People in urgent need can message me and get these pills from me. It's free of charge, and I just want to offer my help," a 46-year-old surnamed Wang posted in a WeChat group of his community in Beijing's Chaoyang district on Tuesday.

Wang said he bought various pharmaceuticals in late November in case his family members became infected with COVID-19, and also received parcels of medicines from his relatives earlier this month.

"I saw many of my neighbors seeking help in the group chat, saying that they could not buy needed drugs as such pills were out of supply at pharmacies due to infection surges. I've sent around 20 pills since Tuesday, with each of the beneficiaries getting two or four pills," he said.

He said that he and his wife were infected around Dec 10, and now have recovered. "I still have two boxes after sending 20 pills to my neighbors. I will continue to offer my help to whoever is in urgent need. I'm not a hero, actually, and I just do what I can to help others. It's a cold winter requiring our united efforts to get through this together."

From the middle of this month, many pharmaceutical companies and local authorities have taken measures to distribute medicines for free or set up platforms to let people help others.

For example, Tencent launched a charitable WeChat app on Tuesday through which COVID-19 patients can ask about what medicines they need while those having extra supplies can offer their help by checking patients' locations. All these services and assistance are free of charge.

People are required to register using real-name authentication before posting any information via the app to avoid any malicious use of the platform or hoarding of medicines.

According to Tencent, over a million users viewed the app in two days after being published with over 50,000 messages by patients and donors posted.

Health authorities at all levels also made efforts to help relieve people's difficulties in buying medicines. Jilin, a city in Northeastern China, began to offer two million pills to locals since Thursday. They are eligible to receive six pills each for free using their identity cards. Beijing's Changping district has over 20 pharmacies offering free medicines to locals.

Also, Haikou, in South China's Hainan province, prepared 40,000 pills for locals free of charge. People there are allowed to get four pills at 42 designated pharmacies from Wednesday to Friday.

A resident receives medicine from a health worker in Changsha, Hunan province, on Friday. YANG HUAFENG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Authorities in Taiwan urged to resume ferries

By **ZHANG YI** in Beijing and **HU MEIDONG** in Fuzhou

Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party authorities have been urged to remove their unilateral restrictions and resume normal ferry services between coastal areas of Fujian province on the mainland and the outlying islands of Kinmen and Matsu.

Zhu Fenglian, a spokeswoman for the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office, made the request in a statement on Friday after the DPP approved the resumption of the ferry services for a limited number of people ahead of the Lunar New Year, which falls on Jan 22 this time around.

The island announced on Thursday that the ferry journeys, which had been suspended for nearly three years, will resume from Jan 7 to Feb 6 so that people from Kinmen and Matsu working on the mainland can return to their hometowns during the upcoming Spring Festival holiday.

Current restrictions exclude Taiwan people on the mainland from taking the ferry to Kinmen or Matsu, where they can then fly back to the island of Taiwan. The DPP authorities claimed such an arrangement is necessary to address concerns over COVID-19 spreading during stopovers in Kinmen and Matsu.

The ferry services, which were launched in 2001, were suspended by the DPP in February 2020 as part of COVID-19 pandemic prevention and control measures.

Many Taiwan business owners working on the mainland have complained about the limited ferry services as air tickets are difficult to book and much more expensive.

Wu Chia-ying, honorary president of the Taiwan Businessmen Association in Xiamen, Fujian, said many Taiwan people who live on the island of Taiwan also need to take the ferry services and it's hoped that the DPP authorities will comply with public opinion.

"It is neither reasonable nor fair for the DPP to block entry from the mainland when it is open to the rest of the world, and make it difficult for many Taiwan people who work and study in the mainland to return home," Wu said.

The ferry services benefit Taiwan businesspeople and young people living on the mainland and many haven't returned to the island for three years since the outbreak of COVID-19, Wu said, and suggested that Taiwan businessmen provide negative nucleic acid test verification before getting on board for contagion-control purposes.

Zhu, the spokeswoman, stressed that there is no obstacle on the Chinese mainland to resuming ferry services between the coastal areas of Fujian and the two counties.

With Spring Festival around the corner, there will be an increasing need for Taiwan compatriots to travel across the Taiwan Straits, Zhu said, adding that, "We are ready to take measures to facilitate their travel needs."

Zhu said: "The DPP should remove the obstacles it has unilaterally imposed for the well-being of its compatriots."

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Roaring into action

A girl interacts with lion dancers while attending a Chinese cultural event on Thursday in Santiago, Chile. IVAN ALVARADO / REUTERS

Opening-up in major sectors seen next year

Advanced manufacturing, smart power, modern services to attract foreign funds

By ZHONG NAN
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1.16 trillion yuan
actual use of foreign direct investment on the Chinese mainland from January to November

China will continue to widen opening-up and guide foreign companies to invest in key areas such as advanced manufacturing, modern services and energy conservation in its market in 2023, the Ministry of Commerce said on Friday.

The government will make appropriate reductions to the negative list for foreign investment and expand opening-up of the modern services industry next year, said Shu Jueting, spokeswoman for the ministry.

The official said that China will actively seek to join high-standard economic and trade agreements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement, assiduously follow relevant rules, regulations, management and standards, as well as steadily expand institutional opening-up.

The tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference, which concluded last week in Beijing, pledged to make greater efforts to attract and utilize foreign capital, widen market access, promote further opening-up of modern services industries and grant foreign-funded enterprises national treatment.

"China will continue to optimize the structure of foreign investment, implement the new version of the catalog of industries to encourage foreign investment and guide global businesses to invest in key areas including high-end manufacturing, modern services, environmental protection and technological innovation in 2023," she said during an online news conference.

The actual use of foreign direct investment on the Chinese mainland expanded 9.9 percent on a yearly basis to 1.16 trillion yuan ($165.99 billion) during the January-November period, while investment from the South Korea and Germany climbed by 122.1 percent and 52.6 percent year-on-year, respectively, said the Ministry of Commerce.

Shu said China will intensify efforts to conduct trials on advanced platforms such as pilot free trade zones and national economic and technological development zones, and accelerate the replication and promotion of pilot experience in other parts of the country next year.

For instance, the State Council approved the launch of a three-year comprehensive pilot project to expand opening-up in the services sector in six cities, including Shenyang, Liaoning province; Nanjing, Jiangsu province; and Hangzhou, Zhejiang province.

The project aims to accelerate the development of the modern services sector, create new advantages in international competition and cooperation, and contribute to speeding up the construction of new development patterns and promoting high-quality development, according to a circular released by the State Council earlier this week.

Eager to seize more market share from China's fast-growing trade in services, A.P. Moller-Maersk, a Danish shipping and logistics services provider, announced on Wednesday that it will build its first green and smart flagship logistics center in China.

With a total investment of $174 million, the project, located in Lingang Special Area of the China (Shanghai) Pilot Free Trade Zone, is expected to be operational in the third quarter of 2024.

"Shanghai plays a critical role in Maersk's global network. With Lingang's proximity to Yangshan port and its favorable free trade policies, this facility will provide agile and sustainable solutions, connecting and simplifying our customers' supply chains, " said Caroline Wu, managing director of Maersk Greater China.

"We will continue to invest in China, contributing to Shanghai's position as a global shipping and logistics center, and the resilience of global supply chains," Wu said.

Apart from operating local businesses, foreign-funded companies in China saw their export value grow 2.4 percent year-on-year to 6.87 trillion yuan during January-November period, said the General Administration of Customs.

China's move to optimize COVID-19 prevention measures has also raised market expectations for an economic rebound, and global investors are viewing the updated policies as "a much-welcomed development" and expect it will help restore business confidence in the long run, said Zhao Ping, deputy head of the Academy of China Council for the Promotion of International Trade in Beijing.

Dialogue: RCEP to benefit intl trade, youth

From page 1

RCEP members now face opportunities brought by the free trade pact as well as unprecedented difficulties and challenges, he said.

The challenges include the lingering Ukraine crisis, the rocky future of global trade, dire problems in food and energy security and a possible stagnation of the world economy, he said.

"Effectively tapping into the opportunities for growth brought by the RCEP will surely further activate the potential for collaboration in various domains and make businesses in various countries better share the opportunities for development brought by the vast market," he added.

According to a recent survey conducted by China Daily's Generation Z Research Center, which polled 500 young people from 40 countries and regions worldwide, 90 percent of the respondents said they perceive the RCEP as "very important" or "fairly important".

The respondents said they expect the RCEP to benefit international trade cooperation and development, and they believe that the implementation of the RCEP will also benefit young people.

Chi Fulin, president of the China Institute for Reform and Development, noted that the total population of those aged 15 to 44 among RCEP member countries was 920 million last year, and the number will rise to 940 million in 2030.

"Amid the severe impact of the pandemic on the global economy and the upsurge of unilateralism and protectionism, joint building of the largest free trade zone in the world requires dedication and a sense of duty among young people in the region as well as efforts to inspire their dynamism, creativity and influence," Chi said.

He urged the RCEP to create a more open and inclusive environment for the development of young people, boost young people's access to the digital economy, unlock the huge potential of youth human resources and facilitate their entrepreneurship, employment and pursuit for vocational skills.

Chi also called for building more platforms such as advisory boards to help young business leaders engage in economic and trade governance and advancing cultural exchange programs.

Sanctions placed on two US citizens

By ZHAO JIA
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China has decided to sanction two United States individuals in accordance with the Anti-Foreign Sanctions Law in retaliation for recent illegal sanctions by Washington on Chinese officials over alleged "human rights" issues related to the Tibet autonomous region, the Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Friday.

The countermeasures against Miles Maochun Yu and Todd Stein took effect on Friday. Yu served as the principal China policy and planning adviser to former US secretary of state Mike Pompeo and Stein is the deputy staff director of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China.

Their assets within Chinese territory will be frozen, the Foreign Ministry said.

Organizations and individuals in China are prohibited from engaging in transactions with them, and the two men and their immediate family members are banned from acquiring Chinese visas or entry to the country, it said.

The countermeasures were taken after the US imposed sanctions on Dec 9 against Wu Yingjie, secretary of the Tibet Autonomous Regional Committee of the Communist Party of China between 2016 and 2021, and Zhang Hongbo, a senior public security official in the region.

"China firmly rejects and strongly deplores that the US imposes illegal sanctions on Chinese officials under the pretext of human rights issues in Tibet," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said on Friday.

Such acts severely interfere in China's internal affairs and violate the basic norms governing international relations, Mao said at a regular news briefing, while urging Washington to revoke the sanctions.

"The US is in no position to arbitrarily meddle in affairs related to Tibet which are purely China's internal affairs," she said, adding that gross interference in China's internal affairs will meet with resolute countermeasures from the country.

COMMENT

Zhang Mengchen

Macao can play a bigger role in cooperation zone

Ho Iat-seng, chief executive of the Macao Special Administrative Region, recently delivered the policy address for the fiscal year 2023 in Macao's Legislative Assembly at a plenary meeting themed "Making Progress Jointly While Ensuring Stability". The address suggests the SAR government will focus on speeding up economic recovery and diversifying the economy, while enhancing infrastructure construction, and improving people's well-being and livelihoods.

According to the policy address, the Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone will be developed on the Hengqin Island, which is part of Zhuhai, a special economic zone that is close to Macao. And there is reason to believe Macao will play a key role in the development of the intensive cooperation zone.

Thanks to the Chinese mainland's high-level opening-up and the rapid development of international cities such as Shenzhen and Shanghai, the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions are facing tough competition. So, in order to sharpen their competitive edge, the two SARs need to consolidate the inherent advantages of opening-up to the outside world, promote innovation in technology, and integrate their development with that of the country.

Hengqin has seen remarkable development since it was positioned as a demonstration area for the new model of cooperation between Guangdong province, Hong Kong and Macao. By the end of 2021, a total of 4,578 Macao-based enterprises had been registered in Hengqin and 314 Macao companies had opened cross-border offices there.

While the Guangdong-Macao Cooperation Industrial Park has provided land for 25 projects, with an agreed investment of 79.3 billion yuan ($11.38 billion), the Guangdong-Macao Cooperation Traditional Chinese Medicine Science and Technology Industrial Park has been cultivating about 50 Macao-funded pharmaceutical projects. And four key Macao-based laboratories have established branch departments in Hengqin, incubating 613 entrepreneurial and innovation projects.

Macao has a rich historical and cultural heritage, and one of its objectives is to build an "area with Chinese culture as the mainstream and multicultural communication" in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. Since Hengqin has relatively poor historical and cultural resources, the Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone will help extend Macao's cultural facilities and activities to Hengqin. That will not only solve the problem of insufficient space in Macao, but also enrich the cultural content of the cooperation zone in Hengqin and improve its cultural environment.

The Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone is expected to play a unique role in building a "humanistic bay area", and assimilate important cultural resources from the Chinese mainland and Macao in Hengqin, and promote Chinese culture abroad.

The Macao SAR government will jointly build, manage and share the intensive cooperation zone, as well as set up customs supervision areas there. As a result, Hengqin and Macao can boast a joint customs area, which will extend the advantages of Macao's free trade port to Hengqin. In the process, Macao will help Hengqin build a truly international business environment, adopt a more competitive tax system, and attract more global consumers and talents.

It is also important for Macao and Zhuhai to promote innovation in the field of science and technology, facilitate the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, and work together to develop new technologies and new industries. By doing so, they will help the Greater Bay Area become a global technology innovation hub, enrich the practice of "one country, two systems", and chart a realistic path for their long-term prosperity.

The year 2023 will be a crucial year for expediting the development of the Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, and achieving the goals of the first phase. The Macao SAR government will work closely with the Guangdong provincial government to accelerate legislative work for the intensive cooperation zone, build a global internet data management system, and formulate a plan for attracting investors to the zone.

The cooperation between Macao and Hengqin will not only give rise to a new industrial development model — of achieving common Macao-Hengqin development goals by using domestic and international resources — but also lead to the development of a hub for global enterprises, enabling mainland enterprises to "go global" and more international enterprises to benefit from the Chinese market.

The author is an assistant professor at the School of Liberal Arts, Macau University of Science and Technology. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Beate Trankmann and Smriti Aryal

Women in science can change world

LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

From climate change to the energy crisis, to COVID-19, the answers to our most universal challenges lie in science. Yet in seeking them, we still exclude the brainpower of half the world – women and girls.

Just 28 percent of engineering graduates, one-third of scientific researchers worldwide and three percent of Nobel laureates are women. At the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Chinese Academy of Engineering, only seven percent of academicians are women. Such imbalances not only risk replicating gender biases and inequalities in new technologies, but also lead to expertise and talent shortages across science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM, globally that society can ill afford. For a future that truly includes everyone, women and girls must be able to participate in science fully and equally.

When they do, the rewards are high. Take Tu Youyou, the first Chinese Nobel laureate in Physiology or Medicine in 2015, decades after discovering the malaria treatment, artemisinin. "Every scientist dreams of doing something that can help the world," she said. When more women become scientists, more people become able to do so.

This is clear in China, where over half of all patent applicants are now women. Women also build more than half of the country's internet companies, like Zhou Qunfei, a migrant worker who later founded touchscreen manufacturer Lens Technology, becoming one of the wealthiest women in technology.

Yet despite making invaluable STEM contributions in China and beyond, women risk being left behind in the fourth industrial revolution. An estimated 80 percent of high-paid jobs created in new green economy sectors, including clean energy, will be in STEM fields dominated by men. This means women and girls could be overlooked and underrepresented in future technologies – unless they are supported in STEM today.

With just eight years to realize the Sustainable Development Goals and a peaceful, prosperous future for all that our planet can sustain, expanding our pool of innovators and experts, by including women fully, is more urgent than ever.

Four steps are vital to achieve this.

First, gender stereotypes and biases holding women and girls back in science must be changed. Microsoft reported that girls in Europe become interested in STEM around the age of 11, but lose interest by 15, suggesting social influences redirect them. Women are also underrepresented in STEM leadership, as well as less likely to be recruited, despite being qualified.

Thirty-two percent of Chinese women scientists encountered employers who only sought out men during their first job searches, according to the journal Nature. To fix this, gender quotas should be applied at all levels to safeguard against discriminatory hiring practices. Gender equality education should also be strengthened, from classrooms to corporations, while a supportive environment for women and girls must be created within families and by employers, to encourage more empowering norms.

Second, removing structural inequalities in scientific fields is essential. Female researchers tend to be awarded less funding, have fewer resources and opportunities, while leaving careers earlier than their male colleagues. Globally, more than one-third of women left full-time STEM careers after their first child. This also happens in China – but three-quarters of those who left said they would return, if sufficient childcare was available. So along with supporting women and girls entering STEM, an inclusive environment is needed to retain them. Research institutions, employers, governments and all stakeholders must increase family-friendly policies and investments, including childcare facilities and services, paternity leave and flexible working arrangements.

While structural changes take time, special measures for women offer more immediate solutions. For example, given that raising children requires extended leave – a responsibility falling disproportionately on women – allowing female researchers longer time to secure funding can help. In 2011, the National Natural Science Foundation of China lifted its grant age limit for women from 35 to 40, boosting the percentage of women winning grants from a major fund for young scientists from 33 percent to 43 percent in one year. Along with the Ministry of Science and Technology, the foundation also raised the number of female scientists on review panels and recommended female applicants be prioritized, when all else was equal.

Third, unpaid care and domestic work has forced women to quit or slow their careers. Among married women scientists surveyed by Nature, 30 percent reported doing most housework, versus only six percent of men. The pandemic has deepened this divide. Comparative data for 2019 and 2020 suggest women scientists as primary caregivers for children experienced a 17 percent decline in research time. Female academics are posting fewer preprints and starting fewer projects than their male peers. Instead of freeriding on women's unpaid work, society should collectively assume the costs, by recasting public spending on care as a social investment. Care and domestic work deserves recognition. It must also be redistributed between men and women.

Increased paternity leave is one way to encourage this. For example, the proportion of men taking paternity leave increased from 4 percent to 39 percent when Norway introduced 4 weeks of full payment paternity leave in 1993 and further increased to 89 percent as Norway gradually extended paternity leave entitlements to now 15 weeks. In China, there are no regulations or legislation at the central level regarding paternity leave, and while in some provinces, men are entitled to as many as 30 days of paternity leave, more will need to be done to rebalance the burden of care.

Finally, outstanding women scientists must be promoted as role models and mentor younger women. Research reveals that women without mentors report the lowest career optimism. Women and girls should be supported early on to take an interest in science and be guided in their careers.

Equality in STEM would enable faster scientific advances and a more inclusive world. It also makes business sense: organizations with gender-diverse executive boards outperform financially by 25 percent, according to the consultancy company McKinsey. Achieving equality not only benefits everyone, but also depends on everyone – parents, spouses, institutions, employers and universities. That is why the United Nations Development Programme, UN Women and the entire UN system partner with all involved to elevate women in STEM.

History shows the incredible leaps humanity makes when women step forward in science – from Marie Curie, to Tu youyou. Such potential likely exists in countless woman and girls today, if they find the encouragement, resources and enabling environment to go forward. Unlocking this is about more than realizing gender equality; it is also about what equality can realize for us all.

Beate Trankmann is UNDP resident representative in China; and Smriti Aryal is UN Women country representative in China.
The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Ivor Ichikowitz

Will US imitate China's approach to Africa?

African nations today seek a very different kind of engagement with the West from what they have known, and the United States is seemingly "all in" on the continent's future. This much was clear at the US-Africa Leaders Summit that concluded in Washington on Dec 15.

Having participated in the events and listened closely to what all sides were saying, I was taken aback by two things — by the degree to which the US is now looking at Africa and, whether or not it was said outright, by the degree to which the commitments forged during the summit were influenced by China's long-standing inroads and continued successes on our continent.

In the past, in that period more than a century ago that historian Thomas Pakenham called The Scramble for Africa, foreign powers vied with one another to divide our continent into colonies, from which they might extract resources. However, unlike in the days of colonization, today Africans themselves choose with whom to forge partnerships and alliances, based on common interests and shared values.

Despite the pomp of what was unquestionably an impactful and enlightening experience, one nation loomed large in the background during the entire US-Africa Summit — China.

Geopolitically, China has been playing to win. In the 1980s, trade between China and Africa totaled $12 million annually, but in 2021, it reached $254 billion. With this exponential increase has come a new focus on private enterprise and public sector initiatives toward the development of sustainable cities on the continent. In other words, measurable projects that bring mutual benefit to both sides, which — after all — is the commonly agreed definition of partnership.

Let's be clear — while seeking similar partnerships in Africa as those held by China, the US and its policymakers, and intrepid industrialists who comprise it, very seriously require a deeper understanding of what the Africans of 2023 want.

In order to provide depth to the answer to this question, the Ichikowitz Family Foundation launched its African Youth Survey, an ambitious study of what 18- to 25-year-olds across 19 African countries think, hope, and plan for the future of the continent they will soon inherit. The findings reflect our current challenges and upcoming opportunities – some of which are obvious, and others that loom over the near horizon.

The study should be deemed a "playbook" for effective US engagement with our continent.

Nearly half (45 percent) of all respondents to the 2022 survey said that death from infectious disease marked the most significant event for them in the past five years. In the African context, this goes well beyond the COVID-19 pandemic that has consumed so much global bandwidth since 2020. Cholera, Ebola, and a host of other viral and infectious diseases continue to threaten the health of Africans as we work to address the root causes and eliminate risks. And as we have learned, these are highly exportable threats.

But in helping Africans to address those threats, the US will find for itself prospects for mutually beneficial economic development. Africans remember well the historic successes of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and, indeed, I was pleased to hear Ambassador Dr John Nkengasong (US global AIDS coordinator and special representative for global health diplomacy at the US Department of State) announce during the summit the start of a revitalized US Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief to accelerate regional manufacturing of critical health commodities on the continent.

In enhancing our localized manufacturing prowess, mutually beneficial opportunity abounds.

One of the most encouraging findings of our research has been the powerful entrepreneurial spirit that pervades even the most difficult economic circumstances in Africa – an astonishing 78 percent of young Africans plan to start their own business in the next five years; two-thirds say their country is encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation; more than three-quarters (77 percent) already have a solid idea as to how they plan to build careers. In concert, these indicators point toward a generation passionately committed to robust economic growth.

And yet, when Africa's next generation, the world's largest collective marketplace and youth demographic, extends its hands seeking a partnership to achieve that growth, in short order, it has always been China that has responded first.

China has long recognized, something the US seems to have just realized, that we stand on the doorstep of a new African Century. And our future is no longer dependent on what can be extracted from our soil and sent beyond our shores, but rather by our own sheer human potential – because right now, demography is our friend.

The natural resources which China has remarkably invested in for decades as the resource race ramps up in tempo, accelerated by global supply chain crises, are evolving in nature – from lithium to labor and the global economy, the fourth and green industrial revolution, will be propelled by African energy.

This is why Washington must ask itself how in 2023 and beyond they can bolster their own growth in Africa through investments that are informed and guided by the complementary benefits Africa and the global powers who seek our partnership bring one another.

Our latest survey does reflect a 10-point advantage for China over the US to date, in terms of what foreign power Africans see as the most influential today, reflecting perhaps the sheer scale and intensity of Chinese engagement on the continent. Even my good friend, Nelson Mandela himself, spoke to the sociological rationale of this mutually fruitful relationship and how Africa would accelerate China's ascendance on the world stage. "China's potential contribution, as one of the world's largest economies and a leading figure in world affairs, cannot be exaggerated," he said.

Our study may be one reason why, in Washington last week, I got the sense that imitation is truly the highest form of flattery. Except this time, it is the US that is doing the imitating – perhaps because they have seen how well real respect for Africans actually works.

The author is a South African industrialist and philanthropist. He is the founder and executive chairman of the Ichikowitz Family Foundation. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

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BUSINESS

RCEP YOUTH DIALOGUE

RCEP a big opportunity for young people

Speakers call for empowering younger generation in 15 member countries with creative skills

By ZOU SHUO
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Youth have an important role to play in further advancing the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and the 15 member economies should continue to pool the strength of young people to advance regional development through the partnership, speakers said at a roundtable of the first RCEP Youth Dialogue on Friday.

The online event, organized by China Daily, the China Institute for Reform and Development and the China Oceanic Development Foundation, focused on young people's role in firmly advancing the RCEP process.

Li Ming, deputy director of the department of policy and planning at the China International Development Cooperation Agency, said China has always believed that young people are the driving force for development in international community and has encouraged and helped young people all over the world through foreign aid and international development cooperation.

Youth are the beneficiaries of as well as contributors to global development. Overcoming global challenges and promoting global development require more emphasis on the role of young people, promoting their growth and reliance on their strength to advance united, equal, balanced and mutually beneficial global development partnership, Li said.

He called for deepening North-South cooperation, South-South cooperation and third-party cooperation to ensure vulnerable and marginalized sections among youth can share an equal development opportunity, so that no country and no young people are left behind.

Guo Yanjun, director of the Institute of Asian Studies at China Foreign Affairs University, said the RCEP spans a region with a youthful population, so it is imperative socially and economically to empower youth with digital skills.

Digital technologies represent the most dynamic industry in the fourth industrial revolution. The digital empowering of youth requires introduction of the latest digital advancements so they could benefit and also promotion of their active participation in learning through creative competition, he said.

Education is also key to enhancing the role of youth in the RCEP member states, he said. It is important to build new digital educational infrastructure for youth, adopt new ideas, frameworks and standards of university management to accelerate students' digital learning, and develop and improve distant learning in rural areas and organize youth forums on smart education, he said.

Chen Yibing, an Olympic champion and associate researcher at Beijing Normal University, said without continuous open communication, progress in sports cannot be achieved and regional and international sports also cannot thrive, he said.

As the COVID-19 epidemic control measures became more sophisticated, new momentum is gathering for sports exchanges among RCEP member countries, he said.

Young people are the heart of sports and competitions, and in the post-pandemic world, more attention will be paid to health, so sports and fitness need further development, Chen said.

In recent years, sports communication activities between China and ASEAN countries have deepened the relations and serve as a platform for promoting friendship and common development, he said.

Shamin Zakaria, an Indian journalist at Xinhua News Agency, said the RCEP is set to become the world's largest export bloc, and the second-largest import destination, offering an opportunity to the young people of the member countries to become a part of a mega trade deal that can shape regional trade patterns and economic integration in the future.

The economy of a nation rests heavily on its capacity to plan for the future, educate its youth, and foster symbiosis in its region, he said.

"To the world, we must send the message that peace and cooperation are essential to economic development, and that these values must be instilled in our future generations so that they, too, can build upon our achievements and make the world a better place."

SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

Wei Xi, an editorial board member at China News Service, said the RCEP can energize innovation and entrepreneurship among young people.

Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises can get access to markets in RCEP countries and even the whole world and realize quick development, so for young people in the region who want to start their own business, the RCEP provides a valuable opportunity, access to a vast market and broad development prospects, she said.

Media organizations should continue to promote and explain the RCEP and its benefits, so youth in member countries can better understand related rules and grasp the market opportunities presented by the agreement, she said.

More efforts are required to promote people-to-people exchanges of young people in RCEP member economies and the media should organize more events for young people to conduct in-depth discussions on regional and global issues, she said.

New generations important for blue economy

By ZHENG XIN
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The youth should be given a significant role in the construction of blue economy partnerships to further tap the potential of ocean resources, said government officials, industry experts and think tank analysts on Friday.

The World Bank describes the "blue economy" as sustainable use of "ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs, while preserving the health of marine and coastal ecosystems", with focus on fields like renewable energy, fisheries, maritime transport, waste management, climate change and tourism.

The youth are going to be a major force in the sustainable use of the oceans and their resources for economic development, said Hu Bo, dean of the Peking University Center for Maritime Strategy Studies, during the first RCEP Youth Dialogue held online on Friday.

The dialogue was co-hosted by China Daily, the China Institute for Reform and Development and the China Oceanic Development Foundation.

The event aims to enhance youth exchanges and cooperation in the RCEP region, pool the strengths of youth, and promote regional prosperity and development.

"We should step up policy support for the youth, especially in emerging services sectors and tourism, where the youth have been playing a key role, and in the ocean economy, or the blue economy, which has become key to our efforts to curb climate change and other environmental challenges facing the world today," Hu said.

His view was echoed by Guo Wenqin, head of research on Hainan Free Trade Port at the China Institute for Reform and Development.

According to Guo, the youth have become the major consumers of outbound tourism in recent years in China. Those aged between 25 and 44 accounted for more than 60 percent of outbound tourism in 2019, while around 40 percent of the Chinese tourists who go on cruises are aged between 20 and 49.

The tourism markets of 15 RCEP member states also have huge potential that can be tapped in the years to come, while the market for ocean tourism, especially cruises, has been witnessing a rapid recovery in recent years, she said.

It is expected the global cruise industry will recover to the 2019 level by the end of this year, and see a whole round of recovery in 2023, she said.

Hainan Free Trade Port should further seize the opportunities presented by the RECP and make the most of its unique geographical and policy advantages to jointly push forward tourism cooperation with RCEP member countries and further unlock the potential of the tourism market.

Experts also emphasized the importance of financing ocean-related economic activities, which will ensure the future sustainability of this vital resource and help combat threats that pose a risk to humanity. They called for more investment in sustainable ocean economy activities.

What they say

Zheng Haoran, *program lead of adolescents and youth at the United Nations Population Fund China*

The United Nations believes that youth not only benefit from sustainable development but can also assist in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals and drive future reforms in the sector. Therefore, the UN includes the voices of youth and cooperates closely with them in the execution, planning and evaluation of SDGs. At the national level, more policies targeted at youth need to be developed and implemented. More efforts are required to support governments as they integrate SDGs into their national and local strategies.

Kong Tuan Yuen, *research fellow at the East Asian Institute of the National University of Singapore*

The 15 member states of the RCEP are diverse in culture, economic development and other conditions, so young people need to make good use of the strengths of their own countries and cooperate with others to achieve the best outcomes. Youth should also innovate and be able to coordinate with past and future generations as the RCEP is an evolving agreement.

Chhort Chhorravuth, *director and project manager of Cambodia's Angkor Social Innovation Park*

Entrepreneurs should thoroughly consider the significant gains of RCEP-related business expansion because the RCEP offers exciting opportunities for Cambodia to reach a new level of business development and market. Around 90 percent of businesses in Cambodia are small and medium-sized enterprises and 66 percent of the 520,000 SMEs in the country have difficulties accessing investment and capital.

Kim Jun-bum, *president of Korean Peninsula Technology Co Ltd*

The RCEP is attracting great attention in that it is the world's largest free trade agreement. The 15 member countries of the RCEP will be grouped into one economic community to secure new growth engines by strengthening supply chain cooperation, promoting investment and expanding intra-regional trade ... Economic cooperation between South Korea, China and Japan is expected to increase rapidly with the RCEP agreement in force.

Zhu Yaping, *deputy secretary-general of the China Aquatic Products Processing and Marketing Alliance*

The youth are the principal part of blue economy development as well as the new force to protect the marine ecosystems and environment. They will play a significant role in developing new models for the development and utilization of marine resources as well as promoting trade in seafood.

Rintaro Tanaka, *director of the Japan External Trade Organization Guangzhou Office*

The RCEP will have a significant positive impact on trade between China and Japan. Under the RCEP, the percentage of tariff-free industrial goods exported from Japan to China will increase from 8 percent to 86 percent ... The RCEP has strengthened the rules on investment and intellectual property protection while new regulations related to e-commerce and data have been added. It is one of our tasks to promote enterprises, especially the small and medium-sized ones, to utilize the preferential policies under the RCEP agreement.

Youth play key role in digital economy

By FAN FEIFEI
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Young entrepreneurs are expected to play a bigger role in helping implement the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement, promoting international economic and trade cooperation and facilitating the development of the digital economy, participants said at the RCEP Youth Dialogue on Friday.

The digital economy is a key area of trade and investment under the RCEP agreement, which has also created favorable conditions for bolstering the growth of digital trade among RCEP member countries, said Li Xiaodong, founder of the Fuxi Institution and research fellow at the Institute of Computing Technology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Li noted that young entrepreneurs have become the main force in developing the digital economy while highlighting their significance in strengthening international cooperation in the realm of the digital economy and promoting regional trade growth.

Xu Xiujun, researcher and director of international political economy at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of World Economics and Politics, said young entrepreneurs have international vision, dare to expand cross-border investment and trade business, and boast the awareness of innovation and competition.

"They will play a positive role in promoting the liberalization and facilitation of investment and trade, bolstering the cross-border flow of personnel, goods, capital and data of RCEP member states, as well as exploring new ways and areas of cooperation and cultivating new growth points, including digital economy, green energy and modern agriculture," Xu said.

The RCEP agreement, which took effect on Jan 1, covers 15 Asia-Pacific economies: China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and 10 member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. It has created the world's largest free trade bloc by promoting regional economic integration through tariff concessions and other trade and investment liberalization and facilitation measures.

The RCEP region covers a market of 2.2 billion people, or nearly 30 percent of the world's population, with a combined GDP of $26.2 trillion or about 30 percent of global GDP, accounting for nearly 28 percent of global trade.

The implementation of the RCEP agreement has not only brought about huge opportunities for investment and trade but also important opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship, said Kuang Xianming, vice-president of the China Institute for Reform and Development.

Kuang said young entrepreneurs have huge potential in driving innovation and entrepreneurship among the RCEP member countries and they should make use of their advantages in technological innovation in fields like environmental protection, new energy, new materials, cross-border e-commerce, cloud computing, big data and artificial intelligence.

With the blossoming of 5G, big data, artificial intelligence and other innovative digital technologies, the digital economy is gradually becoming the integral driving force for economic growth.

Kuang called for efforts to speed up the construction of digital infrastructure, expand international cooperation in the digital economy and emerging industries, and formulate measures to support the innovations and entrepreneurship of young people.

HOSPITALITY

Focus on snow and ice tourism as providers eye opportunities

Winter market in spotlight as firms tempt tourists energized by Olympics

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Local tourists and leisure trips are key factors in shaping this season's domestic ice and snow tourism market, industry observers said.

Data from travel agency platform Ctrip show that more than 70 percent of bookings for ice and snow tourism products are from local residents.

That is in part due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has shrunk travel distances, industry insiders said.

A more diverse and richer winter tourism offering is another reason for the localization trend in the market, which enables more people to enjoy ice and snow sports on their doorstep, they added.

According to another online travel agency, Tuniu, bookings for ice and snow tourism products are mainly sightseeing tours, which account for 58 percent of the winter orders placed on the platform; sports, which take up of 23 percent; and a combination of both, which represents a 14 percent share of the total.

Young tourists dominate the market during the snow season, China Tourism News quoted industry insiders as saying.

The post-1990 generation, referring to people born during 1990-99, prefer skiing on vacation, while the post-1980 generation tend to favor family tours. The two groups account for almost 90 percent of orders placed with China Tourism Group this season, Kang Zhengchun, an executive at the company told the Beijing-based newspaper.

Bookings by the post-2000 generation for ice and snow tourism products surged by 70 percent year-on-year, Kang added.

Ctrip data show combined bookings by the post-1990 and 2000 generations have surpassed half of the orders of tickets to ski resorts on the platform. The post-1980 generation alone contributed more than 30 percent of the total.

After the Beijing Winter Olympics, snowboarding gold medalist Su Yiming and freestyle champion skier Gu Ailing, also known as Eileen Gu, have become sporting idols among the youth, fueling interest in ice and snow sports.

There are tendencies for ski tourists to be young and increasingly professional in skill; these are the distinctive features of this year's winter tourism market, Zhou Weihong, deputy manager of Shanghai Spring International Travel Service — also known as Shanghai Spring Tour — told China Tourism News.

Consumer expenditure on learning to ski is on the rise and ski tourists are shifting spending from trying their hand at sports to investing in their hobby, a Ctrip executive said.

A considerable portion of this year's bookings of ski tourism products is from repeat customers, according to Ctrip.

Compared with previous years, tourists have higher requirements for accommodation and travel experiences this winter, Zhou said. Shanghai Spring Tour will continue enhancing cooperation with ski clubs and skiing equipment brands to create the company's signature snow season products, Zhou added.

The company will also join hands with scenic spots and ski resorts to forge a competitive edge in the skiing industry chain. In addition, it will provide professional skiing coaches and winter camps focused on families and teenagers, the executive said.

"We're optimistic about the prospects of the ice and snow tourism market and have mapped out clear plans for future development," said Kang from China Tourism Group.

The company is striving to become a one-stop skiing service center, providing premium all-around services to ski enthusiasts, Kang noted.

The company said it will continue delving into the needs of ice and snow tourism consumption; reach in-depth cooperation with more suppliers of high-quality ice and snow tourism products and popular winter tourist destinations; and enhance research and development of products combining tourism and sports, in a bid to satisfy the expectations of ice and snow tourism consumers of all ages.

Zhang Shixin, an executive of a travel company headquartered in Inner Mongolia autonomous region, said: "The winter leisure tourism market has enormous potential, especially in the combination of ice and snow resources with culture and folk customs, that is where our faith in the market originates."

Above: Skiers practice their skills at a ski resort in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region in mid-December.
Right: A tourist goes down an ice slide at a winter tourism spot in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, which also features sculptures made of ice and snow.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

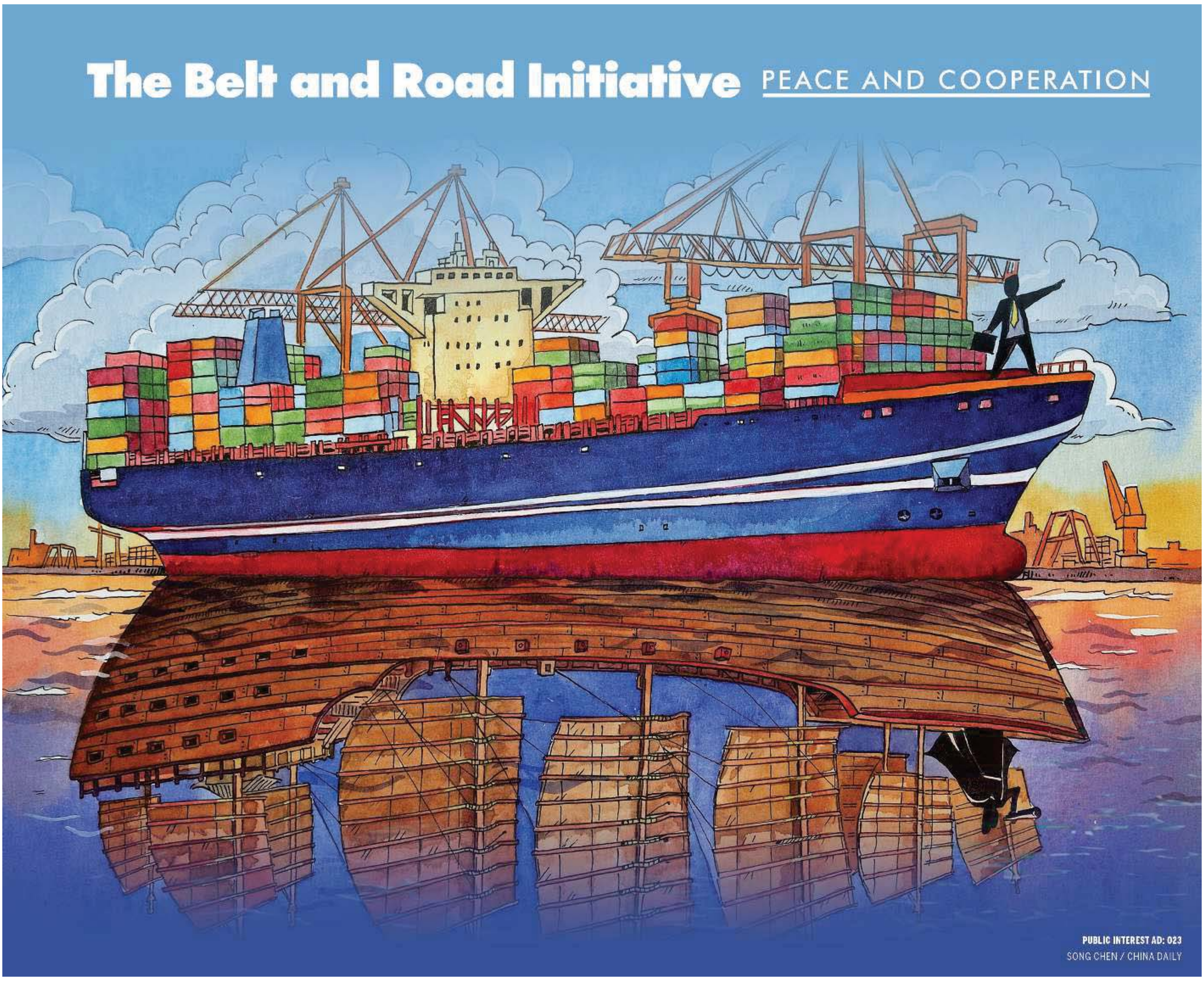
Roundup

BEST TOURISM VILLAGES
Dazhai in South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region and Jingzhu in Southwest China's Chongqing municipality have been named among the Best Tourism Villages of 2022 by the United Nations' World Tourism Organization. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism revealed the news on Tuesday, citing the 32 Best Tourism Villages of 2022 list by the UNWTO. Previously, Yucun and Xidi villages, in East China's Zhejiang and Anhui provinces respectively, had been recognized among the best by the UNWTO. The Best Tourism Villages initiative was launched in 2021.

HIGH PLATEAU AIRPORT
A passenger aircraft landed on Friday morning in Tashikurgan Tajik autonomous county, Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, marking the inauguration of the region's first high plateau airport. The airport, located at 3,258 meters above sea level, is China's westernmost public airport. "A round-trip flight between Urumqi and Tashikurgan has been opened now," said Chen Xiaoguo, general manager of the airport. He added more airlines will soon join. With a 3,800-meter runway, the airport is designed to handle an annual throughput of 160,000 passengers and 400 metric tons of cargo and mail.

ARABIC ARTS FESTIVAL
The fifth Arabic Arts Festival opened in the city of Jingdezhen in East China's Jiangxi province on Monday. The two-day event saw in-depth cultural exchanges between artists from China and Arab countries and showcased the unique charms of Jingdezhen, also known as China's porcelain capital. The festival included a series of cultural exchange activities such as performances, a cultural industry forum and an exhibition. Since 2006, the Arabic Arts Festival has been held every four years in China.

XINHUA



WORLD

US life expectancy falls to lowest in 25 years

COVID-19, drug overdose deaths lead to latest decline, CDC report shows

By **MINLU ZHANG** in New York
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The average life expectancy in the United States shortened by more than seven months last year primarily due to an increase in deaths from COVID-19 and drug overdoses, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said on Thursday.

The latest data brings US life expectancy figures back to where they were in 1996, the agency said.

It found that US life expectancy fell for the second year in a row to 76.4 years last year, down from 77 in 2020, and nearly 2.5 years shorter than it was at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the drop in life expectancy in 2021 was not insignificant, it is smaller than the 1.8-year drop that occurred between 2019 and 2020.

Life expectancy is a measure of mortality. The CDC found that the death rate increased 5.3 percent, from 835.4 per 100,000 people to 879.7 per 100,000 in 2021.

Life expectancy fell by more than eight months for men in the US and by about seven months for women. But women are living, on average, until over 79 years old, which is about six years longer than men.

According to a CDC report published in April, there were approximately 460,000 deaths caused by COVID-19 in 2021. Nearly 1 in 8 deaths in 2021 were due to COVID-19, up from about 1 in 10 deaths in 2020. It was again the third leading cause of death.

Drug overdoses, which killed more than 106,000 people last year and accounted for more than one-third of all accidental deaths in the US, were another major factor in reducing life expectancy.

Many of these drug deaths were due to opioids, particularly synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, which increased 22 percent from 2020 to 2021.

> "The fact that the US in 2020 and 2021 did so much worse than other countries is a warning sign that this health disadvantage that America has had for many years is really getting pretty bad."
>
> **Steven Woolf,** professor of family medicine and population health at Virginia Commonwealth University

460,000
COVID-19 deaths
were reported across the United States in 2021.

Leading causes

Heart disease, the leading cause of death in the US, turned out to be even deadlier in 2021, along with other top killers like cancer, diabetes and kidney disease.

Eight of the top 10 causes of death increased statistically in 2021 compared to 2020, including unintentional injuries and stroke. Only Alzheimer's disease and chronic lower respiratory disease declined among the leading causes of death.

The latest decline came as other wealthy countries saw a rebound after the first year of the pandemic.

Steven Woolf, a professor of family medicine and population health at Virginia Commonwealth University, who was not involved in the study, blamed a variety of factors, including low COVID-19 vaccination rates and the general poor health of people in the US.

"The fact that the US in 2020 and 2021 did so much worse than other countries is a warning sign that this health disadvantage that America has had for many years is really getting pretty bad," Woolf told USA Today.

The CDC report showed that overall death rates increased for all age groups, except for infants younger than 1. But the largest increase was among those aged between 35 and 44, a group that was most affected by drug overdose deaths.

Deaths by suicide and from liver disease, or cirrhosis, caused by alcohol also increased, shortening the average life span in the US.

"The majority of those deaths are to younger people, and deaths to younger people affect the overall life expectancy more than deaths to the elderly," CDC statistician Kenneth Kochanek told National Public Radio.

The CDC also found that death rates decreased for certain racial and ethnic groups last year, especially Hispanic and black men. Death rates rose for nearly all other groups, but most notably for white men and women and American Indian or Alaska Native women, with no significant difference in death rates between Asian men and women.

For a better future

Afghan women chant slogans during a protest in Kabul on Thursday against the ban on university education for women. The prohibition has drawn wide backlash, including from some Muslim nations who deemed it against Islam, and from G7 industrialized nations who said it may amount to "a crime against humanity". But the Taliban said foreigners should stop interfering in their internal affairs. ASSOCIATED PRESS

Briefly

UNITED STATES

FTX founder freed on bail over fraud charges

Cryptocurrency entrepreneur Sam Bankman-Fried walked out of a Manhattan courthouse on Thursday with his parents after they agreed to sign a $250 million bond and keep him at their California home while he awaits trial on charges that he swindled investors and looted customer deposits on his FTX trading platform. Assistant US Attorney Nicolas Roos said in federal court that Bankman-Fried, 30, "perpetrated a fraud of epic proportions". Roos proposed strict bail terms including the $250 million bond — which he said is believed to be the largest federal pretrial bond ever — and house arrest in Palo Alto.

DPRK

Ministry denies arms delivery to Russia

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea's Foreign Ministry denied reports that it offered munitions to Russia, calling it "groundless", and denounced the United States for providing lethal weapons to Ukraine, the official KCNA news agency reported on Friday. "The DPRK remains unchanged in its principled stand on the issue of 'arms transaction' between the DPRK and Russia, which has never happened," a ministry spokesperson said in a statement. The White House said on Thursday that Pyongyang has completed an initial arms delivery to a private Russian military company, the Wagner Group.

UNITED KINGDOM

Ambulance staff to stage more strikes

Thousands of ambulance workers will stage two further strikes on Jan 11 and 23 in an escalating dispute over pay and staffing, the Unison trade union said on Thursday, after a similar walkout by staff on Wednesday. While Wednesday's strike, which also involved workers affiliated to two other trade unions, lasted 12 hours, the two Unison strikes next month will last 24 hours each, Unison said. The strikes come as an already pressured health system faces further strain this winter, with nurses also going on strike in a separate pay dispute.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

WORLD

Russian lives ‘remain stable’ amid conflict

But sweeping Western sanctions have led to breakdowns in supply relationships that have existed for decades

By REN QI in Moscow
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2022 year in Review

Top: People skate on the ice rink opened on Red Square, with the Spasskaya Tower in the background in Moscow on Nov 28. ASSOCIATED PRESS

Bottom left: People visit a newly opened fast food restaurant in a former McDonald's outlet in Pushkinskaya Square in Moscow on June 12. CONTRIBUTOR / GETTY IMAGES

Bottom right: A man enters a building next to a board showing currency exchange rates of the euro and US dollar against the Russian ruble in Moscow on Dec 21. ALEKSEY NIKOLSKYI / SPUTNIK

Heavy snowfall blanketed Moscow in mid-December, disrupting traffic, delaying flights and leaving pavements buried in snow across the Russian capital.

In parts of Moscow, snow piled into mounds over 30 centimeters high, something not usually seen until the end of winter in February.

But for the public, winter is no different from before the ongoing conflict with Ukraine, as the authorities did not raise heating fees. In some apartments, room temperatures can be as high as 27 C.

“Life has to go on,” Pavel Izmailov, who owns a medical device agency in Moscow, said. His company offers services for foreign medical device registrations in Russia and helps sell those devices to hospitals and rehabilitation centers.

He said most people have continued with life as before, and barely remember the conflict nearly 400 kilometers away from Moscow.

“Prices rose, of course, due to Western sanctions and exits of some foreign companies and logistics enterprises. But basically, I don't see anything different from my life one year ago,” he said.

Izmailov has just participated in the 2022 Russian Medical Exhibition, and he met several new potential business partners at the fair.

“If you were at the exhibition, you will be surprised to see so many companies participating and so many buyers from all over Russia,” he said.

He also said several rounds of sanctions did hit Russia's economy, but not as much as the West had expected. Some companies, who had claimed to have left Russian markets, eventually stayed on in various forms.

Some companies left Russia under their current names, but transferred their assets to other owners, Izmailov said.

“For instance, French brand L'Occitane returned to Russia by the end of May, under their Russian name, which means ‘L'Occitane’ in Russian alphabets,” he said.

Interesting situation

Another interesting situation that has arisen on the Russian market is that of the Swedish furniture retailer Ikea. The brand, which has successfully sold its products in Russia for several years, announced the suspension of operations in Russia in March.

However, in June, Ikea said it would leave and sell most assets in Russia. But at the same time, the management planned to keep the business related to the operations of its mega shopping malls, which continue to open normally in 11 Russian cities.

Several competitors in Russia at once expressed their willingness to buy Ikea assets. In other words, Ikea turned out to be a promising investment for those investors.

Russia's economic landscape has been drastically influenced since Moscow launched its “special military operation” in Ukraine on Feb 24, triggering sweeping Western restrictions on its energy and financial sectors.

Nevertheless, despite initial dire predictions of a double-digit GDP slump, analysts and officials have gradually been improving forecasts as the Russian economy demonstrated better-than-anticipated resilience.

An average forecast by 15 analysts polled in early December suggested that the Russian economy was on track to shrink by 3.0 percent this year, close to the Russian Economy Ministry's expectation of a 2.9 percent drop. A similar poll in early November had predicted a contraction of 3.5 percent.

But the decline will continue at a similar pace in 2023, with analysts now forecasting a 2.5 percent drop. Over time, economists have acknowledged that the contraction is likely to be less sudden, but more prolonged than first expected.

“The downturn is not as big as we all thought at first, but this does not mean that we can go into next year peacefully,” Natalia Orlova, Alfa Bank's chief economist, said. “We cannot rule out a deeper contraction next year when compared with 2022, it could be 5-6 percent.”

Russian officials continue to remain optimistic. Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin insists that the sanctions had not disrupted the stability of Russia's financial system or affect macroeconomic stability.

“The applied systemic measures made it possible to stabilize the situation in the economy, support enterprises and entire industries, and save jobs,” he said during a government meeting on Nov 29.

In the first nine months of this year, Russia's income turned out to be higher than expected while its debt levels decreased by a quarter, he said.

Russian Economy Minister Maxim Reshetnikov said on Dec 13 that data on investments in fixed assets over the past nine months could signify a positive trend in 2022.

Positive trend

According to data from the Federal State Statistics Service, known as Rosstat, the growth of investment in fixed assets in the first nine months this year amounted to 5.9 percent.

“Based on the data for nine months of this year, it is already clear that there will be a positive trend in investment at the end of the whole year,” Reshetnikov said.

However, Western sanctions have, in some ways, dimmed hope that Russia could become a modern, prosperous nation in the near term, Vladislav Inozemtsev, director of the Center for Post-Industrial Studies, told The New York Times.

Beneath the veneer of normalcy, key drivers of economic growth like technology transfer and investment are eroding. “It's like a cake that was dropped on the table and it looks more or less fine, but inside it's all blown up,” he said.

The most visible and dramatic impact has been on manufacturing, a sector that employs 10 million Russians and the centerpiece of Moscow's ambitious program to diversify the economy and reduce its reliance on oil and gas exports.

Still, Moscow had withstood sanctions better than many in the West had expected. Since February, the International Monetary Fund has revised its economic outlook for Russia upward twice and is forecasting a 3.5 percent decline in gross domestic product this year, similar to the Russian government's projections.

But the loss of investment, technology and skills caused by the sanctions is likely to echo across generations, depriving many Russians of a chance for a better economic future, experts said.

When Volkswagen launched full production cycles in Kaluga in 2009, Valery Volodin, a welder at a sprawling Volkswagen plant in western Russia, did not only get a job, but also unexpected support.

“I got paid to get trained for the job,” he said. When robots replaced him, he was retrained. The job provided him 50,000 rubles ($718) a month, a payment required by Russian labor law that is the equivalent to two-thirds of his salary.

Volkswagen used to hire about 4,200 workers at the Kaluga plant, which it owns directly. Volvo and Stellantis, which produced and sold the Peugeot, Citroen, Opel, Jeep and Fiat brands in Russia, also have plants in the region. Pharmaceutical companies also flocked to Kaluga, which has a population of 1 million.

An ecosystem of suppliers and related industries sprang up to serve them, employing at least 25,000 people, said Dmitri Trudovoy, chairman of the independent Workers' Association trade union.

By 2020, Volkswagen's output alone represented about 13 percent of the Kaluga region's entire industrial production.

Plant shutdown

But now, Volodin just sits around at home every day, after the car factory closed down in March, joining more than 1,000 multinational companies that exited the Russian market.

“We go to work, but the plant is still shut down,” Volodin said. He does not mind a temporary break from the physically demanding work, but he is not sure how to plan for the future.

“We live from day to day, for now,” he said.

Trudovoy said the workers have no idea who might take over the Western factories and whether they would keep their jobs.

“They are nervous and scared for their future,” he said.

Kaluga's industrial output fell 30 percent between February and July compared with the same period the year before, becoming among the regions hit hardest, according to Rosstat.

Natalia Zubarevich, a geography professor who tracks social economic data at Moscow State University, said: “What we're seeing is falling income, broad depression, less consumption. All this will negatively impact the economy of the country.”

Kirill Nikulin, who owns popular bar Savor in Kaluga, feels that hit.

He had already adapted by finding substitutions for half of the beers at his pub, which he had imported. Buoyed by the seeming return to normalcy over the summer, he opened a store that sells 13 craft beers on tap and 250 more in bottles.

“We believe in the New Year,” he said, hoping sales would be up ahead of the holiday.

7 unexpected disruptions by foreign curbs

Russia is now the world's most sanctioned country. Western sanctions may not have resulted in the dramatic economic collapse that experts had predicted, but they still have far-reaching impacts.

The Moscow Times have listed seven unexpected ways in which Western sanctions have affected lives in Russia over its special military operation in Ukraine.

1 Changes to candy recipes

The head of a confectionery factory in the Ural Mountains city of Perm said in October that the plant, one of the region's largest, had been forced to alter the recipes of some of its products after Western sanctions cut off imports of key ingredients. In addition to changing recipes, factories have to hunt for new work equipment after suppliers in Italy, Germany and the United Kingdom closed their operations in Russia.

2 Slower internet speeds

Mobile internet speeds fell by an average of 0.6 megabits per second compared to the same period last year, according to a study made public by a Russian analytics agency in March. Internet problems will become more serious in Russia as European communications giants leave Russia and network upgrades become more difficult.

3 More crematoriums closing

A major crematorium in the Russian province of Voronezh was forced to close recently following the failure of its only Czech-made plant. It is unlikely that the crematorium will reopen anytime soon, given that the faulty facility cannot be replaced with another one — the European Union has banned the export of such goods to Russia. Similar equipment is used in dozens of cities across Russia.

4 Fewer buses

Local transport operators in 84 Russian cities have canceled more than 200 bus and trolley bus routes this year. Sanctions have disrupted Russian supply chains and had a dramatic impact on Russian car manufacturers.

5 New IDs no more

Russian authorities have given up hope of reforming their ID card system. Since 2013, the Russian government has started a project to change the system of identity documents. The Kremlin even intended to start testing new plastic cards in some regions this year, but Western sanctions have put the project on hold indefinitely. Among the reasons for abandoning this project is the lack of raw materials caused by Western sanctions — Russia cannot produce enough chips and enough plastic to produce these cards.

6 Empty buildings

The number of empty premises and buildings in Russia continues to increase as a large number of retailers leave Russia. Office buildings and malls are increasingly empty because there is no one left to occupy them. The percentage of empty spaces in Moscow malls is estimated to reach 17 percent by the end of the year. Also, 12 percent of all office buildings in Moscow will be empty by the end of the year.

7 Less trained pilots

Russian pilots have fewer and fewer options to train and complete their training, with Turkish Airlines blocking Russian pilots' access to its training and simulators. The ban was imposed following Turkish Airlines' fears that it would also be subject to sanctions by the EU's Aviation Safety Agency. The Turks' decision is dramatic for Russian pilots, given that special training devices are not available either in Russia or in other states close to it.

REN QI

TENDER NOTICE

INFLIGHT CATERING SERVICES TO PIA AT

BEIJING & CHENGDU & GUANGZHOU & XIYAN AIRPORTS IN CHINA

1. PIA invites tenders from In-Flight Catering Services Providers having considerable experience in Airline catering on prescribed tender proforma / tender documents on “Single Stage Two Envelope Basis”.
2. Monthly Meal requirement of PIA at below airports are tabulated below;

STATION	DATE OF SUBMISSION	APPROXIMATELY NO. OF MEALS/ MONTH	STATION ADDRESS
BEIJING (PEK)	January 16, 2023	3,000 (+/-15%)	Manager Outsourced Catering, PIA Food Services Division near Cargo Complex, Jinnah International Airport Karachi, Pakistan Phone: 0092-99047111 Email: intlcat@piac.aero,
CHENGDU (CTU)	January 17, 2023	1,400 (+/-15%)	
GUANGZHOU (CAN)	January 18, 2023	1,400 (+/-15%)	
XIYAN (XIY)	January 19, 2023	1,400 (+/-15%)	

Technical Proposals

3. First envelope to contain company's profile, clientele and other technical details supporting to qualify as caterer/meal provider for the Airline. All relevant certification mentioned in Evaluation Criteria must be attached.

Financial Proposal

4. Second Envelope will contain price schedule of meals, sundry items, handling charges and any other charges, if applicable.
5. Both Technical and Financial proposals to be placed in separate sealed envelopes and be kept in another sealed envelope bearing PIA tender reference No. **FSD/INTL/BJS/CTU/CAN/XIY/05/22** and the date of submission in bold letters. Sealed bids complete in all aspects as required in Single Stage Two Envelope bidding procedure be submitted in the office at above mentioned address, latest by January 16, 17, 18 & 19, 2023 at 1030 hrs local time & Tenders will be opened at PIA Karachi at above mentioned office on above mentioned dates individually at 1200hrs local time.
6. Participants are requested to submit individual tender for each station. PIA will deal individually.

Tender Documents

7. Tender documents can be downloaded from below websites or can be obtained through email from; khihdpk@piac.aero / intlcat@piac.aero.

   i) PIA Website: http://www.piac.com.pk/PIA_Business/pia-Business_Tenders.aspx

   ii) Public Procurement Regulatory Authority Website: http://www.ppra.org.pk
8. Pakistan International Airlines Corporation Limited (PIACL) will not be responsible for any postal delays or damage to the proposals during transit. PIACL reserves the right to extend, amend, reject any bid or annul the whole proceeding in line with PPRA rules.

LIFE

YUNNAN PROTECTS ITS WILD SIDE

Elephants, peafowl and elusive maples given the chance to thrive in China's most biodiverse province

KUNMING — According to the fifth Global Biodiversity Outlook report, biodiversity is declining at an unprecedented and intensifying rate. As the most biodiverse province in China, southwestern Yunnan is sharing its conservation strategy on the international stage.

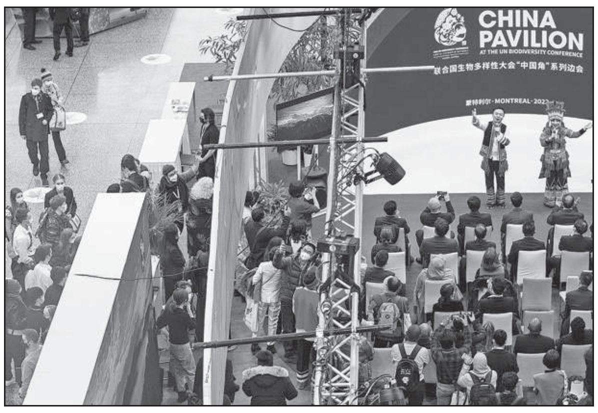
Seventeen years after the province first introduced the concept of Species with Extremely Small Populations (SESP), Yunnan showcased its achievements in conservation on Dec 16 at a side event of the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in Montreal, Canada.

"We will forever lose the opportunity for future development brought by some species if they go extinct," says Yang Hua, an official with the provincial forestry and grassland administration.

SESP was put forward by the province in 2005, as a concept to denote species that were found to be restricted in their geographic distribution and which showed weak population growth.

Ever since then, the province's conservation efforts have helped the population of Asian elephants reach around 360, and that of black-and-white snub-nosed monkeys is now 3,800.

Sun Weibang, director of the Kunming Botanical Garden, under the Kunming Institute of Botany of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said that, during a decade of continuous development, Plant Species with Extremely Small Populations (PSESP), a term derived from SESP, was applied as a conceptual model to conserve native plants in countries such as Italy, Russia, Mexico, and Iraq.



Ethnic Yi singers Li Huaixiu (right) and Li Huaifu from Yunnan province perform at a side event of COP 15 on Dec 16 in Montreal, Canada. ZOU ZHENG / XINHUA

Habitats protected

To conserve animal SESP, project developers were asked to involve animal habitats in their planning decisions by undertaking measures such as setting up ecological corridors, and building bridges and tunnels to facilitate the dispersal of animals.

One of the most iconic animals in the province, the green peafowl is listed as an endangered species on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List, due to the rapid decline of its population, which stands at 600 in the province.

In December 2020, the Yunnan High People's Court ruled that the construction of a hydropower station on the Jiasa River should be suspended as it posed a possible threat to the habitat of green peafowl in the Konglonghe Nature Reserve in Shuangbai county, Chuxiong Yi autonomous prefecture.

The Yunnan case involving the green peafowl was the first such case of public interest litigation in China.

The Asian elephant, which is also under protection as a SESP, saw a "baby boom" in nearly every elephant herd during recent years, demonstrating the success of China's arduous protection efforts — especially important given that the population of the Asian elephant is showing a declining trend globally.

To elevate its conservation efforts, the province developed monitoring and early-warning systems for the giant creature by synchronizing information collected by methods such as infrared cameras, video monitoring and satellite positioning, and visualizing them on a specific mobile phone app installed on the phones of villagers living nearby.

Currently, there are 11 nature reserves for Asian elephants, covering an area of nearly 5,100 square kilometers, and the province has established around 800 hectares of "food stores" for elephants, said Wan Yong, director of the provincial forestry and grassland administration.

According to Wan, the Xishuangbanna Asian Elephant Rescue and Breeding Center has rescued 30 trapped, injured, or sick wild elephants in the past 20 years. China has also set up cooperative mechanisms, sharing conservation knowledge and technical training with neighboring countries such as Laos.

A tree reborn

After years of practice, Yunnan has formulated specific technical guidance for PSESP conservation, including methods such as in-situ, ex-situ, and near-situ conservation.

Before 2016, only five Acer yangbiense — a rare species of maple — had been discovered in Yunnan. They were found in 2001 by a PhD student from the Kunming Institute of Botany, Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Top: A green peafowl in Yunnan province captured by an infrared camera. XINHUA
Above: Black-and-white snub-nosed monkeys at Yunnan's Baima Snow Mountain National Nature Reserve. WANG GUANSEN / XINHUA

At that time, only two of the discovered samples were able to propagate, so the new species was subsequently included as one of the 20 endangered species that require immediate protection in the province's conservation plan for SESP.

The nearby Malutang village was approached for assistance in the Acer yangbiense rescue efforts, and the village chief was tasked with ensuring protection for this plant.

With the help of the village chief, researchers from the botany institute were able to make a scientific breakthrough — they managed to artificially breed over 1,600 seedlings.

Acer yangbiense, a rare species of maple. XINHUA

By analyzing the genetic diversity of the artificially-germinated seedlings and the five wild plants, researchers noted that even though all the seedlings were propagated from one of the five wild plants, there was pollen present from plants other than the five plants they had discovered.

Researchers thus expanded their search for more wild Acer yangbiense, and found 572 wild plants in 2016.

With the aid of the new plants, a total of 50,000 new seedlings were successfully reproduced.

"There is no doubt that our rescue effort has demonstrated effective coordination among relevant authorities, research institutes, and local communities," said Sun.

XINHUA

Seminar explores Confucian thought and imperial court dress

By XU HAOYU
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An academic symposium on traditional Chinese dress, held online by Tsinghua University and the Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology on Dec 17, has provided new insight into the relationship between clothing and etiquette in classical Chinese civilization.

Peng Lin, director of the National Center for Economic Research at Tsinghua University, delivered a speech in which he argued that there is no country in the world where clothing is so closely linked to history, politics and culture as China.

"This conference is a result of our cooperation with the Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology, and we sincerely hope that there will be at least one such conference every year in the future," Peng says.

Feng Shi, a researcher at the Institute of Archaeology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, pointed out in his talk at the symposium that the invention of textiles was not only to cover the body, but also for cultural communication, playing an important role in the construction of the traditional Chinese knowledge system and even cosmology.

"Textiles is not only about making clothes, but also about making culture, civilization and a unique Chinese cosmology," Feng says.

Zhao Lianshang, a specially-appointed professor at Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology and also a researcher at the Institute of Ancient History, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, systematically analyzed the costume system of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) in his report, and summarized the content, main changes, and the etiquette and political reasons and motivations behind *mianfu* during the reigns of the Hongwu (1368-98), Yongle (1403-24) and Jiajing (1522-66) emperors. *Mianfu* was the highest form of court dress in ancient China, worn by royals during ceremonial occasions such as coronations.

Zhao pointed out that the concept of civilization in ancient Chinese society, which combined etiquette and law, played a very important role as weapon of rule, displaying the righteousness and thus bolstering the legitimacy of elites. He claimed that despite intense political struggle, all changes in *mianfu* during the Ming Dynasty were essentially developed from the etiquette system.

Peng mentioned in his report that in ancient times, apart from war, the sacrificial ceremony was the greatest event in imperial politics. And of all the sacrificial ceremonies, the emperor himself worshiping nature was the most important event.

However, from the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) to the beginning of the Song Dynasty (960-1279), there was no certain rule for the dress of the emperor at these ceremonies.

> "This conference is a result of our cooperation with the Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology, and we sincerely hope that there will be at least one such conference every year in the future."
>
> **Peng Lin,**
> director of the National Center for Economic Research at Tsinghua University

Peng pointed out that the duty of an emperor was to set an example for his people, and that these standards were revealed through his behaviors, decisions, and dress, which should be appropriately formal but not overly luxurious.

As for why during the Song Dynasty standards for ceremonial dress were codified, he referred to the explanations given by Song Dynasty Confucian scholars themselves, who said that the formalization of *mianfu* served to curb the indulgence and extravagance of the upper classes and gradually establish what they considered was a more acceptable paradigm for political culture.

In addition, five other scholars in the morning session delivered speeches explaining the connection between ancient Chinese literature and costume and modern design, diplomatic protocol and etiquette.

Li Mei, an associate professor from the Advanced Institute for Confucian Studies, Shandong University, introduced her analysis of dress etiquette from the perspective of Confucianism; Chen Qiyang, an associate professor from Huanggang Normal University, talked about the relationship between mythical creatures and clothing and headwear in the Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-256 BC); Zhou Jiali, an associate professor at China Foreign Affairs University, delivered a lecture on the influence of Chinese traditional dress culture on modern Chinese diplomatic dress; Zhang Yi, a researcher from the Beijing Institute of Economics and Management, delivered a talk on how changing clothing culture encapsulated the development of Chinese civilization; and He Yang, a professor from the Ethnic Costume Museum at the Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology, explored the connections between traditional design and the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics uniforms.

In two afternoon sessions, 28 speakers engaged in a discussion on the relationship between Confucian ideology and costumes in different dynasties, with eight reviewers providing academic commentary.

According to Jia Ronglin, head of the Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology, the academic symposium not only described ancient fashion from the perspective of Confucianism, but also showed the influence of clothing on ancient philosophy.

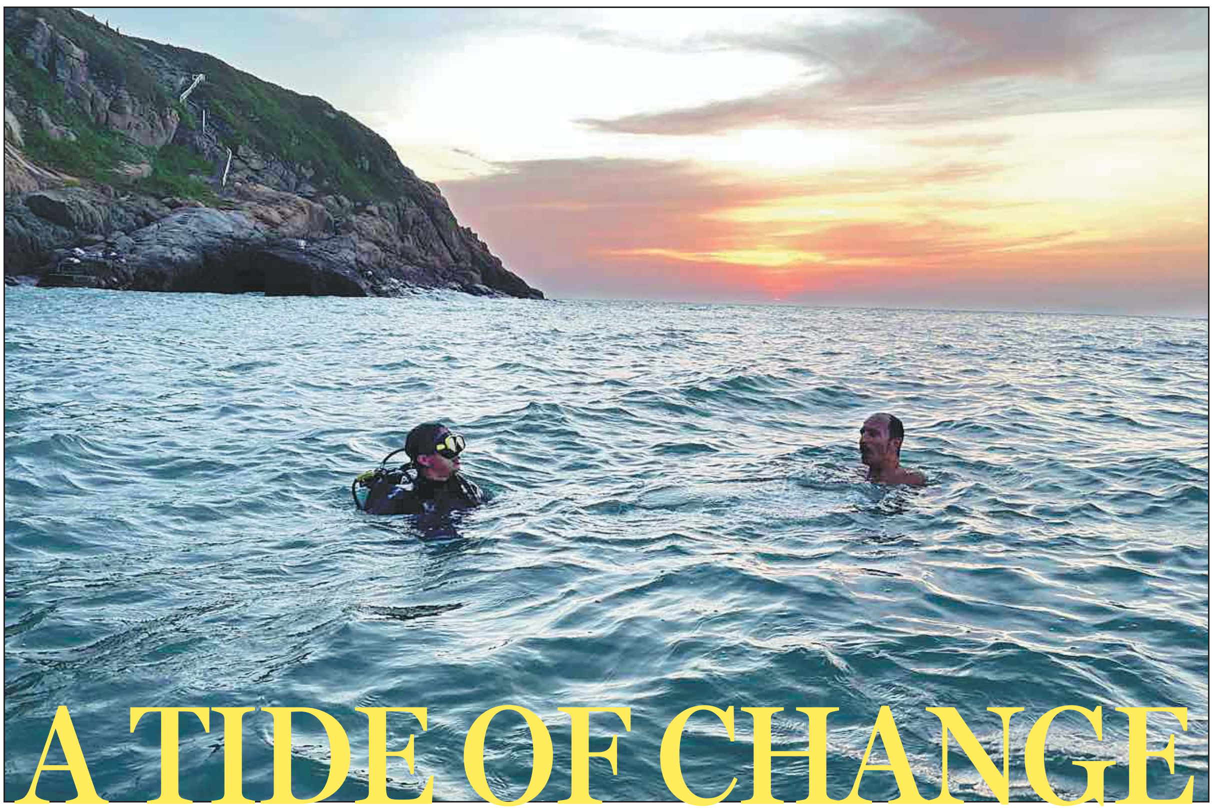
The research results presented integrated, multidimensional perspectives using comprehensive methods involving Chinese history, philosophy, archaeology, design and other disciplines, he says.

"The value of this symposium is not only limited to the objective discussion of history and culture, but also a bright practical guiding significance for the development of contemporary Chinese society," says Jia.

Left: Peng Lin, a professor at Tsinghua University, speaks at the online seminar.
Above: A sketch of *mianfu*.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

LIFE

From left: Shen Xiaoming dives into the water off the Dapeng Bay in Shenzhen, Guangdong province. Models of marine animals are on display in Shen's library. Shen checks on coral reefs. **Below:** Shen (left) seen sampling marine environmental DNA with a partner off the Dapeng Bay. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



A TIDE OF CHANGE

'Guardian of the seas' hopes wave of public awareness will save the oceans, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

Shen Xiaoming has had several personas throughout his career. These include a cultural and tourism news reporter and an internet company boss.

Yet, after such diverse employment, Shen in his late 40s decided to make a splash as an ocean protector.

This no doubt stemmed from an early interest in diving.

The Shenzhen resident hosted a roundtable in early December where he invited renowned ocean ecologist Avigdor Abelson to lecture on the importance of public participation and collaboration in scientific research in ecological environment.

The audience included professors from Tsinghua University and the University of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

"Now during the pandemic, many foreign scholars cannot come to China, so we can communicate through this form of network to exchange new ideas and cases in the field of marine ecology abroad," Shen says.

In 2011, Shen went diving off Malaysia and was amazed by the underwater scenery he had never seen before.

"All kinds of fish swam past in groups, and the light overlapped against the deep blue landscape," Shen recalls.

The biggest surprise came when he reached the coral reef area, where he found himself in the middle of a bustling scene.

"I could hear the sound of pistol shrimp hitting the water with their chelipeds from the cave, and the gurgling of the croakers," he says.

"Some fish sounded like a hammer hitting a nail, and some made a sound like a steam whistle."

Yet, he found a completely different scene when he first dived into Dapeng Bay in Shenzhen, South China's Guangdong province, in 2014.

"It was silent, and not a sound could be heard from under the water," he says.

As he looked for reasons for the silence, he found some fishing boats had scraped the seafloor clean in previous years when conducting fishing operations, damaging the coral, one of the oldest creatures on the planet.

Replanting hope

Coral is the aggregation of limestone skeleton-like structures secreted by coral insects.

Though coral may look like a colorful plant growing from roots in the seafloor, it is actually an animal that forms reefs.

These reefs provide food and habitat for marine species around the globe.

Realizing the importance of coral reefs, Shen established public welfare organization Dive For Love with his diving friends in 2014.

"We believed that if corals were replanted, sea creatures such as wild groupers and abalone would come back," Shen explains.

They cleaned garbage from the seabed, where they found miscellaneous items, such as mesh tarpaulin, sacks and plastic bags.

They had seen crabs, sea urchins and various fish caught on the fishing nets, as well as some corals die for failing to conduct photosynthesis.

"We've seen people leave behind their swimsuits on the beach, which could be swept back to the sea," Shen says, adding that he has found one of them covering a big cave coral that was already whitened.

"It would take seven to eight years for a coral to grow up this big, but it only needs a cheap swimsuit to destroy it."

Another focus of the organization is to restore coral reef resources in Shenzhen.

Shen and his team would swim like fish in the ocean, searching for coral branches broken off by typhoons or trawler anchors.

> "We believed that if corals were replanted, sea creatures such as wild groupers and abalone would come back."
>
> **Shen Xiaoming,** founder of Dive For Love, a public welfare organization in Shenzhen dedicated to protecting the oceans

"We then nurture them in seabed nursery gardens where they would be exposed to good sunlight and water flow," Shen explains.

The nursery gardens were developed after trial and error. They are made of iron pipes and flexible hot-melted pipes as the frame, with counterweights at the bottom and plastic nets hanging on the pipe frame to plant coral after his team's consultation with experts from the South China Sea Institute of Oceanology, Chinese Academy of Sciences.

They managed to withstand the force of waves, while enabling the broken coral reefs to grow.

"When they recovered to a healthy state and grew to a certain degree, we would then use a specific glue to graft them onto natural coral reefs."

The glue is rock hard after 10 hours and is friendly to the ocean.

All the steps are meticulously conducted manually and are time-consuming, but Shen believes the efforts are worth it.

To date, Dive For Love has nearly 3,000 registered volunteers from all walks of life. "Most of them are between 20 and 40," Shen says.

They first learn how to dive for free before they are granted opportunities to give ocean protection lectures to new members or the public.

To date, the organization has helped to restore nearly 10,000 coral fragments.

Biodiversity survey

Shen has made a point of advocating ocean science popularization.

In 2017, volunteers from the organization staged a marathon where they wore coral reef-shaped headdresses and carried bags made of fishing nets to pick up trash along the way. The event was aimed to increase public awareness of their cause.

In 2018, Shen built a library on ocean culture.

"It's more about sorting out knowledge, and is complementary to the practical operations at Dive For Love," Shen says.

Shen and his team would share their findings on biodiversity at the library to appeal to the public.

"The biodiversity survey is mostly done at night, when the active creatures were different from their counterparts in the daytime," Shen explains.

They record their nocturnal diving experiences and edit them into short videos before putting them on the social media of the library.

The library has been a popular summer camp spot for young people, especially local primary school pupils.

Huang Yu joined Dive For Love in 2016 and she managed to take photos of hermatypic coral — a species under state second class protection — spawning multiple times, which has contributed to local coral archives.

"When the coral was spawning, it was like a powder snow in the sea, very beautiful," Huang says.

She put more efforts into popularizing coral protection after she saw how the sea creature was injured by fishing nets. "You feel like your own child is being amputated," she says.

Huang has also given livestream broadcast on explaining coral spawning, which received more than 2.9 million views from multiple social media accounts.

In recent years, the marine ecology of the Dapeng Peninsula has improved greatly due to the annual fishing moratorium, improved legal system, enhanced publicity on coral protection, and ongoing coral restoration and planting.

It is worth mentioning that the southwest end of the peninsula has a concentration of 47 species of hexacorallia, where a national marine park is being planned to better protect them.

"Such a prospect is worth looking forward to," Shen says.

Speaking about his future plans, Shen says he will keep on pushing forward his cause.

"Things happening at sea still get less attention compared with those on land," he says.

As things are resuming to normal state after three years of the pandemic, Shen is looking forward to stepping up cooperation with related parties in Indonesia and the Philippines.

"I believe more exchange programs will reach more people in the cause of ocean protection and help them appreciate the charm of the sea," Shen says.

Contact the writer at yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

Fresh pastures of opportunity for herders

LANZHOU — Yaks used to be everything for Tsering Thondup, 51, an ethnic Tibetan and formerly a nomadic herder from Northwest China's Gansu province.

He once raised some 40 yaks in the pasture, barely making ends meet by selling the meat and milk they produced. Now, all his yaks are managed by a breeding cooperative near his home, and he is employed by the cooperative and earns a steady income.

Tsering Thondup's hometown, the Gannan Tibetan autonomous prefecture, has developed yak husbandry as one of its leading industries. The yak population there now exceeds 1.2 million, accounting for some 7.5 percent of the national total, according to Wang Wei, director of the animal husbandry technical services center in Gannan.

As a major source of revenue for herding households, the yak industry accounts for 42 percent of the average disposable income of local farmers and herders. However, traditional breeding methods are not only inefficient in modern times but also cause serious grass degradation.

"Almost every household in the nearby villages raises yaks. The soaring numbers of cattle and sheep have affected the quality of the grass and reduced incomes in the long run," says Kunphel Lhagyl, manager of the breeding cooperative and a former herder.

In 2014, with the support of the local government, Kunphel Lhagyl set up a breeding cooperative in Luqu county, which is equipped with modern facilities.

The cooperative now manages nearly 700 yaks. During the warmer seasons, its workers herd yaks in the pasture, while the yaks are bred in sheds during the colder seasons.

Wang says the semi-intensive breeding and grazing method has more benefits than just being environmentally friendly. "It also helps increase efficiency."

Many of Tsering Thondup's neighbors have chosen the same path, entrusting their yaks to the cooperative and receiving bonuses as a result.

"With the cooperative taking care of our yaks, we can leave the nomadic life. Some go out to find jobs, and some run family inns or restaurants," Tsering Thondup says.

The yak industry has gained support from the authorities in Gannan. The local government has encouraged enterprises to extend industrial chains for goods, such as yak meat, milk and leather.

At a yak milk trading center in Gannan, a huge screen shows the real-time information on yak milk prices and stocks in regions, such as Gansu and Sichuan provinces.

Trucks carrying fresh yak milk collected from herders can often be seen entering the center established by Hualing Dairy Co Ltd. The milk is then processed into various dairy products, such as milk powder, milk candy and casein.

Min Shaohua, manager of the company, says the production lines have increased the incomes of nearly 30,000 households in Gannan.

"The organic dairy products are greatly favored by urban consumers," Min says, adding that the company will deepen its technical cooperation with universities and research institutes to add more value to the products.

XINHUA

Yak husbandry is one of the leading industries in the highland areas in Gansu province. XINHUA

LIFE

In its first performing season, Qingxin Ensemble will give eight concerts at the Anglican Art Centre, the home to the historic Anglican Church. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Music becomes moveable feast

Moving from the traditional concert hall venue, young ensemble plays to a wider audience, **Chen Nan** reports.

It was a chilly winter Sunday on Nov 13. Nattily dressed visitors strolled through the Anglican Art Centre, a new hub in Tianjin and the home to the historic Anglican Church, a typical Gothic style architecture.

Some paused to admire the facade of the old building, which was designed by British Sinologist and architect Arthur Christopher Moule. The construction started in 1900 and ended three years later.

Yet the prime attraction was taking place inside the church that night. About 200 people had come to listen to the Qingxin Ensemble perform a diversity of programs.

The concert was opened by a music piece from the Baroque era, *Concerto Grosso in D major, op. 6 no. 5, HWV323* by George Frideric Handel, the German-born English composer. The ensemble also performed two contemporary music works during the first half of the concert: *Entr'acte for string quartet* by American composer Caroline Shaw and *Song of the Ch'in* by Chinese-American composer Zhou Long.

The second half of the concert saw them play *Lua Descolorida*, the second of the three songs for soprano and string orchestra written by Argentine composer Osvaldo Golijov. To warm applause, they closed the concert with the *Holberg Suite* by Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg.

"The connection is really palpable," recalls violinist He Yujie, one of the founding members of the Qingxin Ensemble, adding that the tickets for the concert on Nov 13 sold out after about 20 minutes, which was beyond the ensemble's expectation.

The concert opened the ensemble's first performing season, which will bring eight concerts to the Anglican Church until next May.

> "For many of us, who received classical training as children, we aim to find jobs at professional symphony orchestras or music schools after graduation. But we have to live with the changes brought by the coronavirus pandemic, so we expanded our vision for career."
>
> **Liu Zhangjuan,** violist and founding member of Qingxin Ensemble

With a theme of "Soundscape of History & Modernity", the ensemble will perform music pieces from different eras and with different styles. They will also work with a number of musicians, including violinist Yu Xiang, double bassist Zhang Daxun, oboist Liu Mingjia and clarinetist Zhou Xiangyu.

"We are very excited to have our first performing season at the Anglican Church. It's quite different from performing at concert halls where we usually perform. That's what we want from the very beginning — chamber music takes place in venues as diverse as the music itself," says He.

Founded in 2021, the Qingxin Ensemble gathers young musicians, who graduated from the Tianjin Juilliard School and the Juilliard School in New York, as well as students from the two schools who are still pursuing their music studies.

People are attracted to a performance by the Qingxin Ensemble outside the Tianjin Juilliard campus. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Qingxin refers to "chasing evergreen artistry with a young heart". The average age of the ensemble is about 27. Members of the ensemble currently live and work in Tianjin and Beijing.

According to He, most of the members of the ensemble had studied abroad and returned to China, hoping to pursue their music dream in their home country.

"For many young classical musicians, especially new graduates, who are deeply concerned about their careers, COVID-19 poses a great challenge with public events unable to go ahead and performing venues closed. With this ensemble, we hope to learn the art of entrepreneurship, assisting young classical musicians with the process of creating their own musical niches, building an audience following," says He, who was born in Sichuan province and studied at the New England Conservatory, where she earned a Bachelor of Music degree. In 2018, He studied at the Juilliard School in New York, where she gained her Master of Music degree.

"For many of us, who received classical training as children, we aim to find jobs at professional symphony orchestras or music schools after graduation. But we have to live with the changes brought by the coronavirus pandemic, so we expanded our vision for career," says violist Liu Zhangjuan, also a founding member of the Qingxin Ensemble.

Besides her role in the ensemble, Liu is also the violist of the MILA Quartet, the inaugural graduate chamber music fellowship quartet of the Tianjin Juilliard School.

In the fall of 2020, the MILA Quartet, a string group consisting of Zhu Ke and Ci Huan, both violinists, violist Liu and Lyu Xinyang, a cellist, was offered a full scholarship of a two-year master of music degree in chamber music at Tianjin Juilliard, taking classes in the morning and having many late-night rehearsals.

"We all have the experience of playing chamber music since it's part of our education in college. There's a sense of excitement of discovering the joy of chamber music in our early careers," says Liu.

Liu was born in Chengdu and received her bachelor's degree at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, National University of Singapore. She also holds master's degrees in viola performance and chamber music from Rice University's Shepherd School of Music in Houston, Texas.

The Tianjin Juilliard, the first overseas campus of the New York-based Juilliard School, also shows great support to those young musicians by forming a partnership with the Qingxin Ensemble. Besides collaborating with the ensemble on performances, creative projects and lectures, the Tianjin school also provides rehearsal space and performance opportunities to the young ensemble. The school's faculty are also invited as guest artists to perform side by side with the ensemble.

In July, the Qingxin Ensemble gave an outdoor concert outside the Tianjin Juilliard campus beside the Haihe River, which attracted thousands of appreciative spectators. The program featured music works by composers such as Maurice Ravel and Dmitri Shostakovich as well as music pieces adapted from Chinese folk music pieces.

"It was our first public concert and we were very nervous," recalls He Yujie. "When we saw the warm reaction of the audience, who enjoyed music through our programming, we were thrilled."

He Wei, CEO of the Tianjin Juilliard, says the school encourages and supports students to perform outside concert halls to bring music to a wider audience.

"The founding of the Qingxin Ensemble shows the young musicians' passion for chamber music and their own way of communicating with the audiences outside the concert halls. Their programs are creative and rewarding."

According to He Yujie, during her studies at Juilliard in New York, one of her most compelling experiences was performing at a local hospital. That experience reshaped her artistic vision and values, and made her believe in the power of music to unite and connect people.

The ensemble also embodies Juilliard's values through their roles as artist-citizens and forays into musical entrepreneurship. Performing outside concert halls, such as libraries for children and senior homes, will be an important part of their future plan, He Yujie says.

Contact the writer at chennan@chinadaily.com.cn

Millennium-old Buddha statues unearthed in ancient market

XI'AN – More than 680 fragments of Buddha statues and pagoda sculptures have been unearthed in the ruins of an ancient market in Xi'an, Northwest China's Shaanxi province.

The statues were discovered in a pit in the ruins of East Market, a major commercial center during the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

The Buddha statues were made of clay, ceramic and stone, and most of them had been damaged, according to Han Jianhua from the Institute of Archaeology under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, adding that they were packaged and moved elsewhere for better protection and further research.

Many of the Buddha statues are decorated with colored drawings and gold elements, which was a unique style of Buddhist art during the Tang Dynasty.

Based on Han's speculation, the statues may be related to a Buddha hall or a shop's warehouse located on the street.

Archaeologists have also found paths, drainage ditches and house foundations, as well as a large number of cultural relics of the Tang Dynasty, including tricolored bowls, in the East Market ruins.

The market ruins were found in the late 1950s. With an area of around 1 square kilometer, the site is over 1,000 meters long and 924 meters wide.

XINHUA

Bamboo slips engraved with 'Chengdu' found

CHENGDU – A batch of bamboo and wooden slips from the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) engraved with the Chinese word "Chengdu" was released recently by the cultural relics and archaeology research institute of Chengdu, the capital of Southwest China's Sichuan province.

From April to December last year, the institute conducted an excavation at the site of Zikujie Street in Chengdu and cleared out 53 pieces of bamboo and wooden artifacts with complete and clear writing, according to Tang Bin, the person in charge of the excavation site.

Another 212 pieces of suspected bamboo and wooden slips were found, Tang says, adding that the word "Chengdu" is visible on one of the bamboo slips.

"Based on the lettering style, it is speculated that these slips date from the late Warring States Period (475-221 BC) to the Qin Dynasty," Tang says.

A large number of cast copper weapons and a batch of pottery were also unearthed at the site.

"The bamboo and wooden slips discovered this time are the earliest of its kind found in Chengdu, which contains information such as administrative management systems, officials and historical geography," says Zuo Zhiqiang, associate researcher of the cultural relics and archaeology research institute of Chengdu.

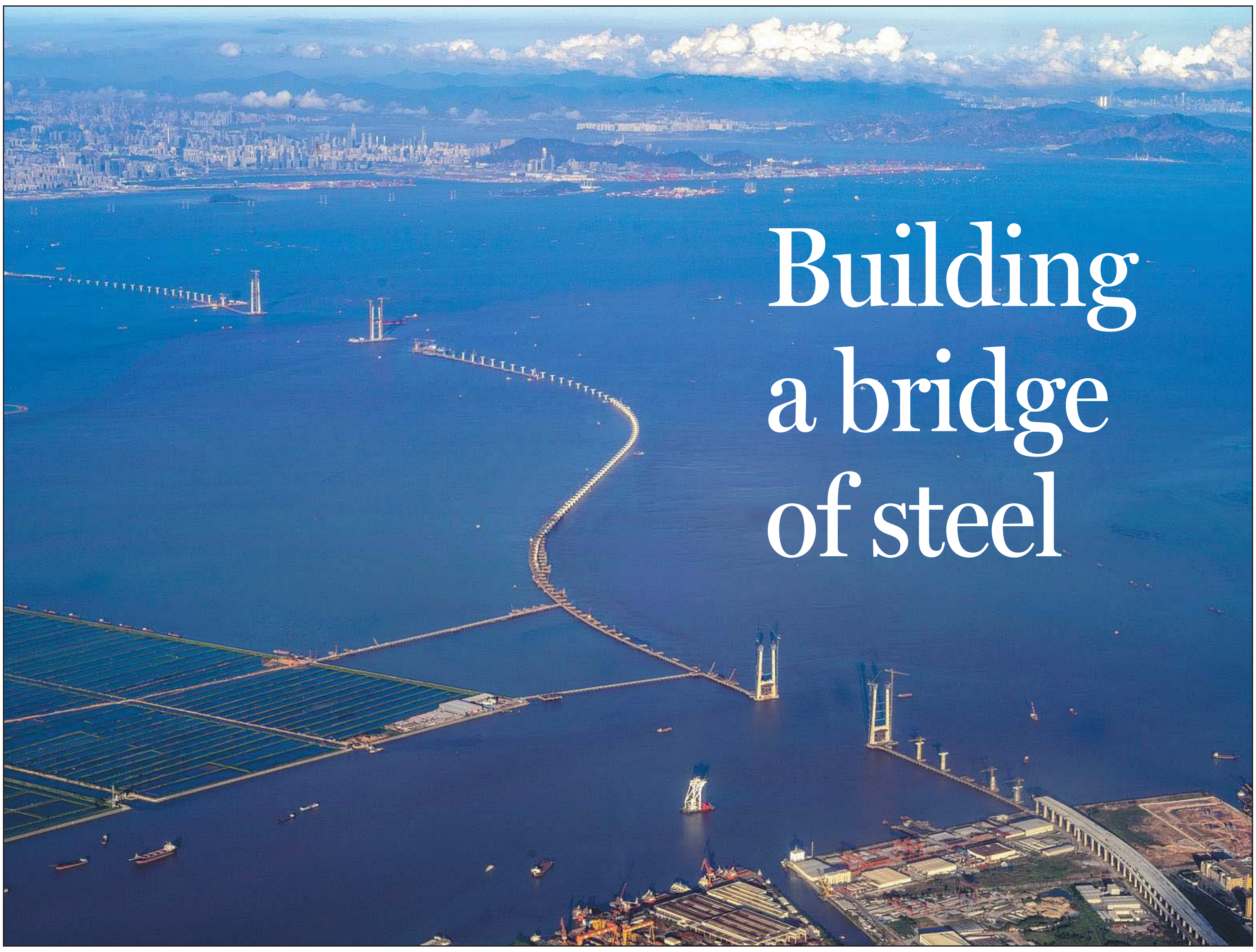
"They are of great historical significance and also have high calligraphy art and cultural value," Zuo adds.

XINHUA

LIFE

From left: Suo Xuhong (right), deputy director of the project's surveying and mapping center, discusses sailing routes with captain Wang Xuefeng. Construction materials are delivered to the artificial island. Workers climb to check the signal lines.

Building a bridge of steel



Above: A bird's-eye view of the under-construction bridge that will connect Shenzhen and Zhongshan in Guangdong province. **Below:** An artificial island is a part of the complex infrastructure project, linking the bridge and a tunnel.

Photos by ZHOU HONGSHENG and **HU LEI**
For China Daily

Due to open in 2024, the Shenzhen-Zhongshan bridge across the Pearl River is expected to cut commuting time between the two cities in South China's Guangdong province from two hours to about 30 minutes. Construction of the bridge is currently in full swing.

The project is a sea-crossing link, integrating two bridges, two artificial islands, a two-way eight-lane tunnel and underwater channels.

The link is designed with a total span of about 24 kilometers, and the speed limit on the crossing, when it is completed, will be a maximum speed of 100 km per hour.

As an important infrastructure project in China, the bridge, once completed, is expected to improve transportation in the Greater Bay Area, which covers the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions and Guangdong.

The bridge will also serve as a corridor linking the Nansha, Qianhai, Cuiheng and Hengqin areas of the province.

The construction started in December 2016.

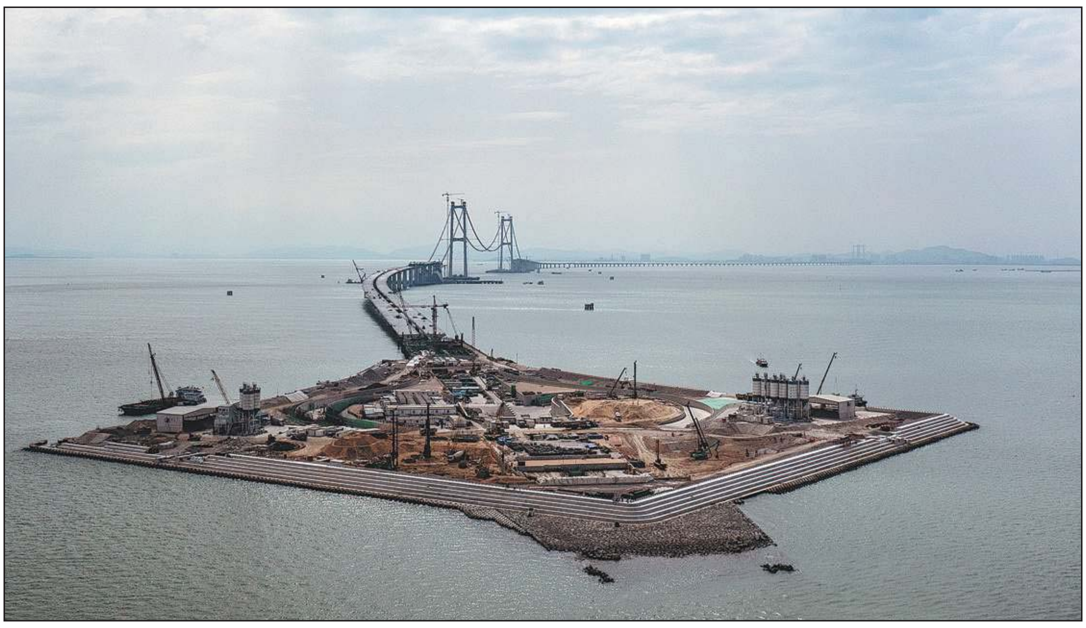
With a length of 6.8 km and a width of 46 meters, the two-way eight-lane tunnel will be the largest and widest in the world. More than 320,000 metric tons of steel is required for its construction.

It has been the major transportation construction project under the country's 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-20) and will help further develop the Pearl River Delta region.

The plan to build a roadway across the Pearl River dates back to 2002, when the Guangdong government started research on building a cross-river channel between Shenzhen and Zhuhai in Guangdong.

In 2008, the government carried out a feasibility study on the construction of the Shenzhen-Zhongshan bridge.

In December 2015, the National Development and Reform Commission, the country's top economic planner, officially approved its construction.



From left: Workers help deliver construction materials. The construction of the west artificial island is in full swing. Suo examines some cabling.*